DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 194 223 PS 011 824

TITLE	Blocks: A Creative Curriculum for Early Childhood.
INSTITUTION	Creative Associates, Inc., Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY	Administration for Children, Youth, and Families (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	79
CONTRACT	105-78-1003
NOTE	154p.; For other manuals in this series, see PS 011 820-830.
AVAILABLE FROM	Creative Associates, Inc., 4419 39th Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20016 ($6.95; complete set of manuals, $47.55)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Curriculum Development; Curriculum Guides; *Early Childhood Education; *Instructional Materials; *Learning Activities; Play; Preschool Children; Preschool Teachers; Teacher Role; *Toys
IDENTIFIERS	*Blocks; CDA; Child Development Associate

ABSTRACT

This Early Childhood Curriculum Manual, one of four manuals based on approaches developed in the "Celebration in Learning '76" program, provides guidelines for block play activity to adults who work with young children. The first chapter introduces unit blocks, explores some of the problems teachers commonly face in the block area, identifies the stages of development in using blocks and offers suggestions for teachers on a variety of topics including clean-up. Chapter Two considers the impact of the physical environment on children's behavior and ability to learn and offers suggestions for arranging furniture and materials in the block area. The teacher's role in the block corner is explained in Chapter Three. Chapter Four looks at how blocks can be used to recreate real life settings. The teacher's role in listening, observing, facilitating and supporting dramatic play is explained. The opportunities for learning math skills and for problem solving are presented in Chapter Five. The last chapter demonstrates how to make blocks and discusses other types of blocks and their care. At the end of each chapter there is a list of suggested activities which adults can try including some specific ways to implement the information in their own classrooms. An annotated bibliography of articles and books on blocks is included in the Appendix. (Author/MP)

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BLOCKS

A CREATIVE CURRICULUM FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

PS011824

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The Creative Curriculum Series was originally prepared under grant HEW-90-C-438 to "Celebration in Learning '76". It was revised and completed under contract from the Administration for Children, Youth and Families HEW-105-78-1003.

The material presented in this series represents the opinions and viewpoints of the authors and not necessarily those of the funding agency.

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Published by
Creative Associates, Inc.
4419 39th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20016

Distributed by
Gryphon House
P.O. Box 217
Mount Rainer, Maryland 20822

Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 79-52821
ISBN 0-934362-03-3 (volume 3)
ISBN 0-934362-00-9 (set)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This Curriculum Manual grew out of a series of six workshops designed for early childhood staff in 1976. Diane Dodge had the major responsibility for the design and implementation of the workshops. The following people contributed to specific sections of the workshops:

Paula Tiberi and Bernice Williams - The Teacher's Role
Nancy Klinger - Dramatic Play with Blocks

The task of recording the content of the workshops in book form was assumed by Ginny Redish. Staff members who contributed ideas and suggestions to the development of the manual were Charito Kruvant, Mimi Tse and Cheryl Jones. It was revised and edited in 1979 by Diane Dodge. The graphics were drawn by Brian Jones, cover design by Lila Hochberg and typing and layout by Joanne Cooney.

We especially want to thank all the participants in the workshops who freely shared their concerns and experiences in working with young children.

BLOCKS

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FOREWORD

This Early Childhood Curriculum Manual is one of four manuals based on approaches developed in "Celebration in Learning '76" (CIL), a research and demonstration program funded by the Office of Child Development (DHEW) in cooperation with the Washington, D.C. Bicentennial Commission. A primary objective of CIL was to design and pilot test in-service training workshops for early childhood personnel with a special emphasis on the utilization of space and materials in the classroom. The workshops showed how room arrangement can affect children's behavior and offered practical ideas for organizing and using materials with young children. The training offered in these workshops served to help teachers identify and learn ways to extend the basic social and cognitive skills children can gain by exploring materials and participating in activities associated with six classroom areas: Blocks, Table Toys, Art, House Corner, Books, Clay and Play Dough.

Following these workshops, the CIL staff developed four Early Childhood Curriculum Manuals: Blocks, Table Toys, Art and House Corner. The manuals, as completed and revised by the staff of Creative Associates in 1979, are based on the content presented in the workshops. They are intended to provide specific guidance in using materials and arranging the areas where materials are used. Theoretical information is presented in the context of practical approaches which teachers can use to foster intellectual, socio/emotional and physical development of children.

A Trainer's Guide is available for each of the manuals. The guides present a workshop approach and philosophy and offer suggestions on presenting each section of the Curriculum Manual in a workshop setting.

Two of the manuals, Bloques and Arte, are available in Spanish. These manuals cover the same subject areas as their English counterparts but the specific content is oriented to the learning styles and special interests of Spanish speaking children.

A companion Annotated Bibliography entitled Resource Materials for the Creative Curriculum has also been produced by the project. The bibliography offers a comprehensive review of articles and books focusing on the House Corner, Art, Blocks, Table Toys, Water, Sand, Books and Clay/Play Dough. A special feature of the bibliography is the inclusion of a set of criteria to assist teachers and parents in evaluating the racial and ethnic images projected in children's books.

INTRODUCTION

Blocks, A Creative Curriculum, is a practical manual designed for adults who work with young children and who wish to expand the activities in the Block Area. The manual is divided into six chapters. The first chapter introduces unit blocks, explores some of the problems teachers commonly face in the Block Area, identifies the stages of development in using blocks and offers some practical suggestions for teachers on a variety of topics including clean-up. Chapter II considers the impact of the physical environment on children's behavior and ability to learn and offers practical, illustrated suggestions for arranging furniture and materials in the Block Area. The teacher's role in the Block Corner is explained in Chapter III including how to involve children in block play, what to say to children about their buildings, how to resolve disputes and how to get children to clean-up. Chapter IV looks at how blocks can be used to recreate real life settings. The teacher's role in listening, observing, facilitating and supporting dramatic play is explained. The opportunities for learning math skills and for problem solving are presented in Chapter V. The last chapter shows how you can make your own blocks and discusses other types of blocks and their care. At the end of each chapter there is a list of suggested activities which adults can try including some specific ways to implement the information in their own classrooms. An Annotated Bibliography of articles and books on blocks is included in the Appendix for people who wish to read more extensively on this topic.

The Block Curriculum Manual is intended to serve a variety of needs. For the individual reader (including teachers and parents) the Manual offers a chapter-by-chapter sequence of topics which may be read as a whole or selectively depending on the needs and interests of the reader. For center directors and others involved in training teachers and parents, the topics covered in the Manual can serve as the subject matter for a workshop or series of workshops. A Trainer's Guide giving specific suggestions for presenting each topic in a workshop setting is also available from Creative Associates.

The content of the Manual is particularly appropriate for teachers who are working towards certification through the Child Development Associate Consortium (CDAC). The Manual identifies the CDA competencies related to the use of materials in early childhood classrooms and then shows in detail how these competencies apply in setting up a Block Area for young children. The list of competencies for the Block Area follows this page.

CHAPTER I

GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH BLOCKS

Topics covered in this chapter:

I-1. What are blocks?

I-2. Exploring how you feel about blocks.

I-3. Observing children.

I-4. Stages of block building.

I-5. Helping children from one stage to the next.

I-6. Preserving buildings with photos or sketches.

I-7. Cleaning up.

I-8. Suggestions for further activities.

Goals for this chapter:

1. to look at our own feelings about blocks -- negative and positive.

2. to find out about stages of block building.

3. to explore one way of valuing children's buildings through photos or sketches.

4. to learn new ways to approach clean-up.

I-1. What are blocks?

Five of the six chapters in this book are about the hard wood solid unit blocks found in most centers. In the sixth chapter, other types of blocks, particularly large hollow blocks and the cardboard blocks that look like bricks are considered.

Unit blocks come in many shapes. The pictures on the next page show 25 sizes and shapes that are available. The basic unit block is 5 1/2 inches long, 2 3/4 inches wide, and 1 3/8 inches high. The other sizes are in exact proportion: for example, the double unit is exactly as big as two unit blocks. This is why blocks are considered a good tool for teaching concepts in math.

Commercially sold unit blocks are made of solid hardwood. Look for blocks that have finished edges and are sanded. While they represent a large initial cost, well-made blocks are durable and long-lasting. For school use, unit blocks are sold in sets as well as open stock. Companies which sell hardwood unit blocks include:

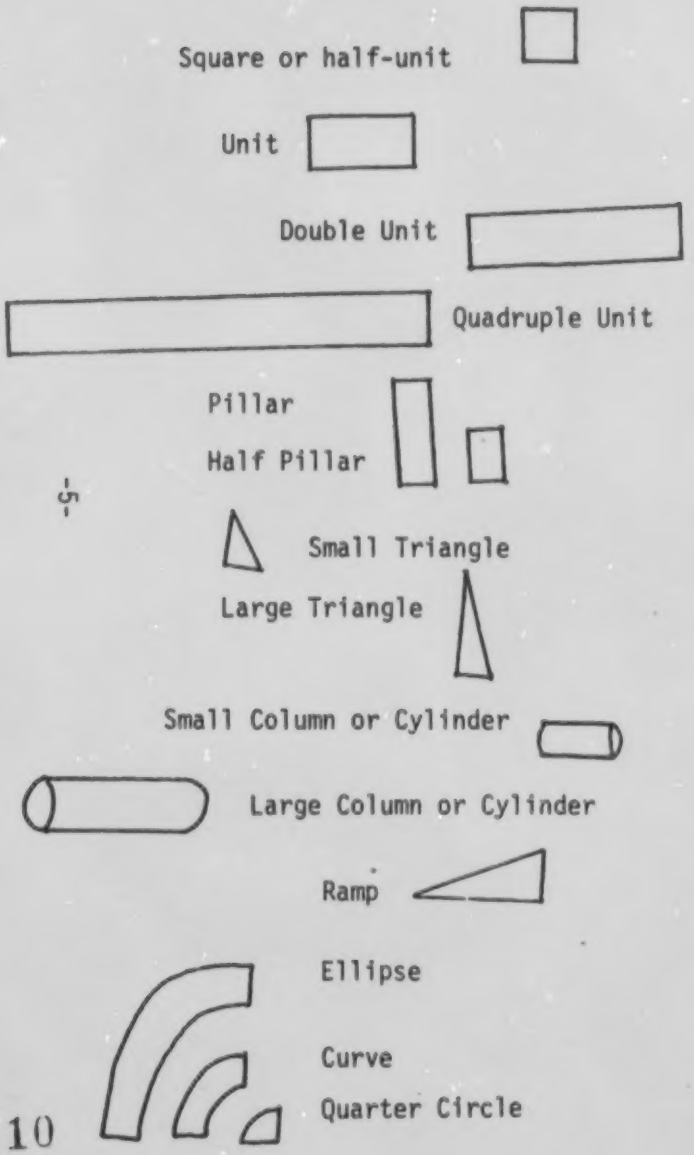
- Childcraft Education Corp.
  20 Kilmer Road
  Edison, New Jersey 08817

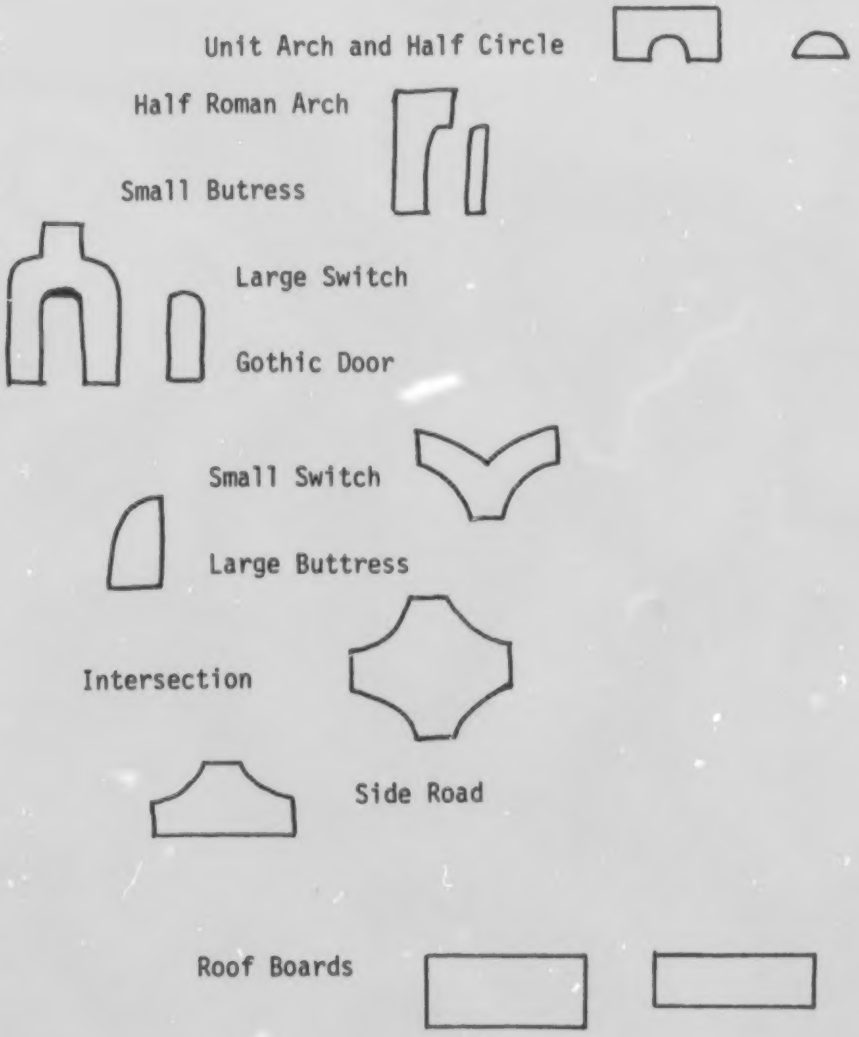
- Community Playthings
  Rifton, New York 12471

- Kaplan School Supply Corp.
  600 Jonestown Road
  Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27103

Unit blocks are best used on the floor. There are sets of blocks that are much smaller and are generally used as a table toy. Some of the discussion in this series could carry over to those little blocks too, but in the activities here we will be working with the unit blocks on the floor in a "Block Area."

UNIT BLOCKS


Square or half-unit
Unit
Double Unit
Quadruple Unit
Pillar
Half Pillar
Small Triangle
Large Triangle
Small Column or Cylinder
Large Column or Cylinder
Ramp
Ellipse
Curve
Quarter Circle


Unit Arch and Half Circle
Half Roman Arch
Small Butress
Large Switch
Gothic Door
Small Switch
Large Buttress
Intersection
Side Road
Roof Boards

I-2. Exploring how you feel about blocks.

Most early childhood classrooms are equipped with blocks, but children respond differently to them. Some go to the Block Corner frequently while others hardly go there at all. Similarly, some teachers enjoy blocks very much and others are not very comfortable in the Block Corner. Even teachers who do think blocks are very important in the curriculum still find that blocks can cause problems.

Think about your negative feelings for a minute. Is there anything that you don't like about blocks? What bothers you about what goes on in the Block Corner?

Try to come up with at least three reasons why you don't like blocks. (You can jot them down here if you want to.)

_____

_____

_____

Some of the problems teachers often mention are:

- blocks are too noisy
- children don't like to clean up the blocks
- blocks take up too much shelf space
- you need too much floor space for blocks
- blocks can be dangerous -- children might get hurt when buildings fall down or children throw blocks
- children use blocks for guns
- blocks get taken to the House Corner for food
- blocks are boring
- children fight over the blocks
- buildings get knocked down and that makes some children sad or angry

- some children don't get involved with blocks
- girls don't play with blocks
- some children dominate the block play all the time
- blocks splinter and get dirty
- supervising the Block Corner takes too much time
- children don't learn anything from playing with blocks.

In this Manual we will suggest ways to overcome the problems.

Change sides now and think positively about blocks. Is there anything you like about blocks as an activity? What do you think children learn from block play? (Use this space to write down as many good points about blocks as you can think of.)

_____

_____

_____

Other teachers have mentioned these reasons why they think blocks are an important part of their program:

- children learn math concepts; they learn about weight, balance, measurement
- they learn different shapes
- they learn new words
- it helps both large muscle and small muscle development
- they get an idea of how buildings are made
- children learn many concepts such as: same and different; tall and short; sizes; over and under

- they get practice in sorting by size and shape
- they practice matching
- they identify patterns
- it develops visual memory
- it can be a safe activity if you limit the number of blocks and set some rules
- blocks are fun to use
- children can be very creative with blocks
- children can learn how to clean up
- children can get a sense of satisfaction from blocks; they are proud of what they can make with blocks
- by reconstructing the real world in blocks, children can dramatize and learn what different roles are like (for example, they might build a boat and then pretend to be sailors).

As you read this Manual we hope your list of reasons for liking blocks increases and your reasons for not liking blocks decreases.

I-3. Observing children.

What happens in the Block Corner depends on the children in your class -- how old they are; what they've done before; what they are doing now. It is an important principle of teaching that you have to know what each child can do before you can teach that child what to do next. The best way to find out what a child can do is through observation.

Observing children means watching carefully what one child or a group of children is doing and being able to describe what you see.

Certain children stand out to their teachers (especially those who tend to act out or who are so quiet the teacher worries about them). But what about the other children -- the ones who are neither too active nor too quiet? Even teachers who

think they know each of their children are often surprised at how much they can learn by focusing on one child for a period of time.

In observing children, it is helpful to have a focus for your observations. There are two basic ways: (1) follow one child for a period of time looking at that child in each activity he/she goes to; or (2) look at one activity area, for example, the Block Corner, observe the children who happen to be there and try to follow their activities for five or ten minutes at a time.

Before starting to observe, you should decide what you want to be looking for. In the Block Corner some important things to look for might be:

- Do the same children come to blocks every day?
- Are there some children who never come to blocks?
- Do the girls avoid the Block Corner?

(If your observations indicate that these are problems for you, your next question will probably be, "What do I do?" Some suggestions for encouraging reluctant children to use the Block Corner are in Chapters II and III.)

- What are the children building?

When you observe in the Block Corner, you will probably see how different one child's buildings are from another child's. But children's block constructions can be grouped into several levels or stages. The next section on Stages of Block Building is background information to help you recognize the different levels of block building in your classroom.

I-4. Stages of block building.

All children go through stages in using blocks just as they do in any other area of development or learning. Of course, each child goes through the stages at different rates and different ages. Even the order of the stages is not rigid. Knowing about these stages may help teachers feel more comfortable about what their children are doing. For example, it is appropriate for beginners to spend a lot of time just carrying blocks around. When a teacher sees a "city" or a high tower made by five-year-olds, it helps to remember that those same children probably did not build such structures when they were three or four.

Stage I. Blocks are carried around.

Very young children often spend days just carrying blocks around. They are learning about blocks: how heavy they are, what they feel like, and how many can be carried at once.

Stage II. Piling up the blocks or laying them out on the floor.

When children first begin to build with blocks, they are likely to stack them in piles or to lay them out flat on the floor. The towers they make are usually not even. Sometimes the blocks put flat on the floor don't touch each other at all.

The children are still learning a lot about the characteristics of blocks: how putting one on top of another makes a tower; what different arrangements look like lying there on the floor. They try out different sizes like units and double units, and different shapes.

If you watch your children, even at this early stage some children are thinking very carefully about how the block will look when put down with the other blocks on the floor. In Chapter III on "The Teacher's Role" we will discuss what to say to children about their block work. Here we simply wish to point out that most children go through this stage of making piles or flat rows.

Flat rows suggest roads and so small cars and trucks are usually the first toys children need for this block play.

Roads are often a transition from the piling stage to the stage of making buildings.

Stage III. New ways to connect blocks.

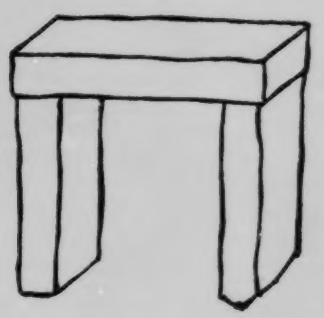
By three and four years of age, children who have been building with blocks for a period of time are usually putting blocks together to make constructions. They make discoveries and solve problems as they use blocks in new ways. Some types of buildings you may see are:

a. Enclosures -- putting blocks together to enclose a space.

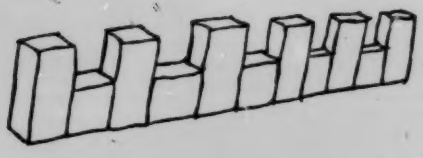
At first, children are usually interested in enclosures as a new technique. Making the enclosure is a satisfying experience

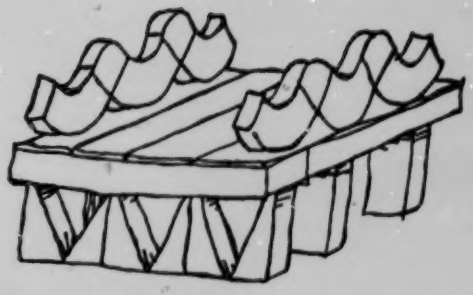
by itself. Later the enclosure may be used for dramatic play with zoo or farm animal accessories. Enclosures also lead to math discoveries like area or geometric shape.

b. Bridging -- setting up two blocks, leaving a space between them, and connecting the two blocks with another block.



c. Decorative patterns and a sense of balance.

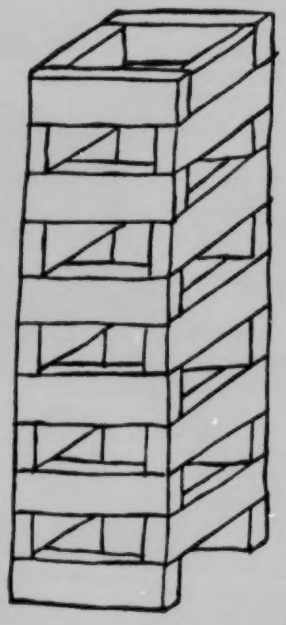




Children are often fascinated with symmetry, balance and patterns. Once they have combined a few blocks in a certain way, they may continue the same pattern as long as they can find enough blocks to use. They are learning to see likenesses and differences and they are developing motor skills. (Look at the concentration on the face of a child who is carefully balancing the top bar of a bridge.)

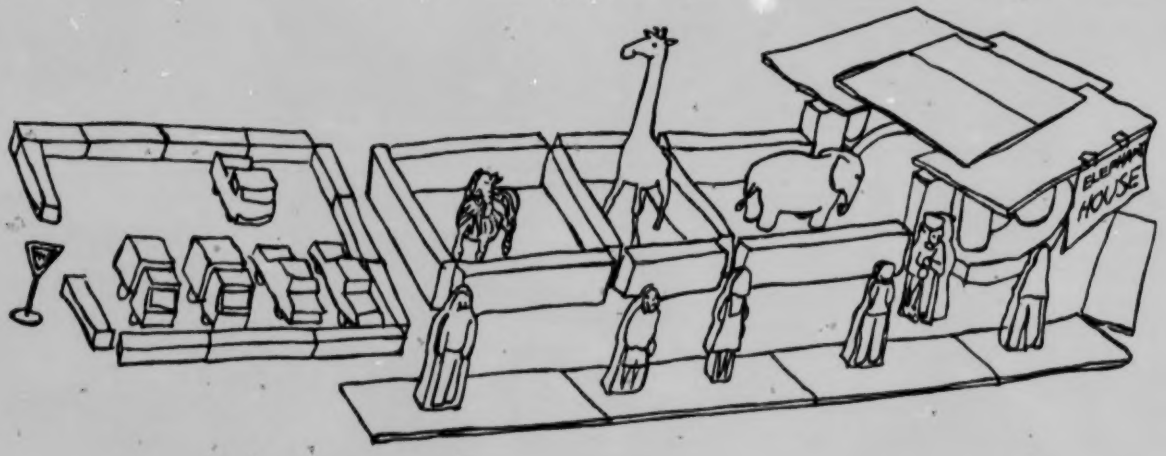
Stage IV. Naming buildings, using buildings, making elaborate constructions.

As they get more experienced (around 4 to 6 years), children begin to name the buildings they make:

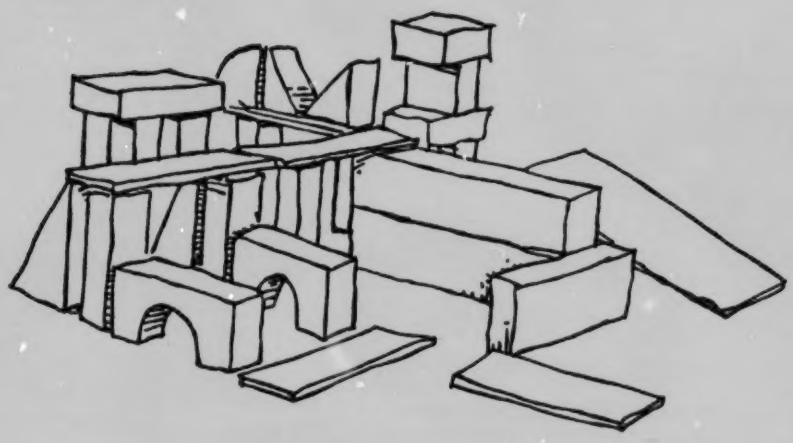


"Apartment House"

and then use the buildings for dramatic play:



Experienced builders often make quite elaborate structures. These are especially typical of children who have done a lot of preliminary building in the earlier stages.



I-5. Helping children from one stage to the next.

Teachers often ask, "What should I do if a child piles up blocks day after day. Should I move a child to the next stage?"

There is no one answer to this question. It depends of course on the child. Some points to remember, however, are:

- Piling up blocks isn't just busy work. It's an important and natural stage in block building.
- Some children need to pile blocks (or similarly to do any type of block building) over and over and over again. The child may be gaining confidence in him/herself, learning to feel comfortable with blocks.

- When the child is ready to go on to another stage of building, he/she will probably do it him/herself having seen other children's buildings.

- If you think the child is ready for something new, you might offer different blocks, make a suggestion, show the child photos or a book.

There is more on the teacher's role in block building in Chapter III.

I-6. Preserving buildings by photos or sketches.

Sometimes when a child has made a very special building, he or she is reluctant to take it apart. If you have a Block Corner where buildings can be left up overnight, do so. That way, children can:

- continue with a construction; this leads to more elaborate building.

- play with or in the structure. Blocks are more likely to be used as a setting for socio-dramatic play if the children can spend a lot of time with one structure.

Unfortunately, in many rooms the Block Area has to be used for other activities at other times of the day. And even in a classroom with a separate Block Area, the building will eventually have to come down.

One way to preserve a block construction is to take a picture of it. Polaroid or other instantly developed pictures are particularly good because:

- The child sees the pictures right away.

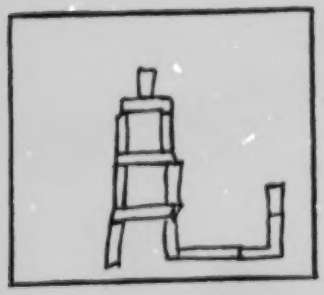
- You are giving an important message to the child: that you value the work even though it has to come down.

- Pictures are special. Many teachers have found that when they began to take pictures, The Block Corner became very popular.

Children wanted to build and have a picture taken of their construction -- or of them with their creation.

- When photos of constructions which children made are put in the Block Corner, they often serve as an incentive to that child and to other children.

- By taking pictures of the same child's work over a period of time, you have a visual record of the development that child has gone through in block building.



If you don't have a camera, you can still "preserve" the construction by making a sketch or drawing of it. This also gives the children the message that their block building is being valued. You don't have to be an artist to sketch a picture that will make a child happy.

I-7. Cleaning up the Block Corner.

Even if you have captured the constructions in pictures or sketches, the blocks still need to be put away. For many teachers, one of the most difficult problems with the blocks is getting them cleaned up.

When the Block Corner has been well used and there are lots of blocks out, putting them all back may seem like a gigantic task. What can we do to make it easier?

Here are some suggestions:

- Limit the number of blocks and the number of shapes at least in the beginning when children are learning how to use the blocks and how to clean up.

- Label the shelves so that the children know where to return the blocks.

- Help with clean-up until children are able to do it by themselves.

- Have children put extra blocks away during play time so that the task isn't overwhelming at clean-up time.

- Make clean-up a game:

  (1) Give each child a "ticket" with a block shape on it. He/she puts away all blocks of that shape.

  (2) Give each child a name of a shape. "You're Mr. Square. You are Ms. Cylinder." Child puts away all blocks of the same name.

  (3) Declare a number for the day. "Today we'll clean up by threes." Each child collects three blocks at a time and puts them away.

There are other suggestions or ways to facilitate clean-up throughout this book. Chapter II shows how arranging the space and labelling materials can make clean-up more fun and a learning experience. Class meetings prior to clean-up and other suggestions are discussed in Chapter III.

I-8. Suggestions for further activities.

(A) Working with the blocks:

Many teachers haven't had a chance to know first hand what block building is like. It might be fun to spend some time on the floor in your Block Corner working with the blocks.

- Choose blocks that appeal to you and build whatever you like. How does it feel to build there? Does building make you aware of any problems your children might be having (not enough room, not enough blocks, too many blocks, floor not flat enough)? What elements do you see in the structures you have made? Are there enclosures, bridges, symmetry...?

- Try making different kinds of constructions:

  piles of blocks

  roads

  enclosures

  bridges

  a balanced design

  a building.

This is a good activity to do in a group. Members of the group support and encourage each other. The group situation is closer to what happens in a classroom. When a group of teachers gets together to build like this, they often encounter situations similar to those children experience in the classroom.

-- If someone builds too near the shelves, it is difficult to get the blocks out.

-- If you build too close to someone else, accidents happen.

-- When you are really involved in what you are doing, you sometimes don't hear the teacher telling you to stop.

-- Sometimes you can't find enough of the right shape, but you can find something else to use instead.

In a group you will also see clearly that everyone makes different constructions. These observations are also true of a classroom situation with children.

(B) Observe the children in your room for one week. What stages of block building do you see?

(C) Take pictures of block building in your room. Does the camera have any effect on: (1) the children's willingness to take down buildings; or (2) the children's desire to go into the Block Corner and build?

(D) Start a file of pictures of one or two children's building. Take occasional photos of their buildings over a six month period. (If you don't have a camera, you can still do this activity by observing and drawing sketches.) Did you see any changes in the types of buildings these children do? Can you relate their development to the stages of building described in this chapter?

CHAPTER II

ARRANGING SPACE AND MATERIALS FOR BLOCK PLAY

Topics covered in this chapter:

II-1. Room arrangement and behavior.

- (A) Behaviors which encourage or discourage development and learning
- (B) How different arrangements encourage different behavior
- (C) Guidelines and practical ideas for arranging the Block Area to foster development and learning
- (D) Illustrations on arranging an area for block play.

II-2. Arranging the materials for block play.

- (A) Accessories for block play
- (B) Illustrations on displaying materials
- (C) Some questions teachers often ask.

II-3. Suggestions for further activities.

Goals for this chapter:

1. to explore how room arrangement and the display of materials influence children's behavior.
2. to develop guidelines on where and how to set up an area for block play.
3. to look at the types of materials (blocks and accessories) that we can provide in the Block Corner.
4. to show how to make labels (outlines and/or pictures) for block area materials.

Introduction.

How the room is set up and how materials are arranged have a lot to do with how children behave. Rearranging space and materials can cause children to change what they do and how they act.

Before we can decide what arrangements would be best in our early childhood classroom, we first have to think about how we want the children to behave. Then we can work at different ways to arrange the furniture and consider how these arrangements might affect children's behavior.

II-1. Room arrangement and behavior.

(A) Behavior characteristics which encourage/discourage development and learning:

Think for a few minutes of how you would like children to act in your room. What behavior would you like to encourage. If it helps, think of one or two specific children in your own class. What is it that these children do that makes you feel they are learning?

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Behavior characteristics which indicate that children are learning might include:

- Children can stick with a task.
- Children can choose an activity and follow through.
- Children can work independently or with a group of children.
- Children are not easily distracted by other activities.
- Children use materials well and take care of them.

- Children share materials with others.
- Children ask questions and have ideas.

On the other hand, some behavior does not foster learning. Think of some ways children act in class that bother you. What behavior do you wish to change?

_____

_____

_____

Some typical kinds of behavior that teachers often mention are:

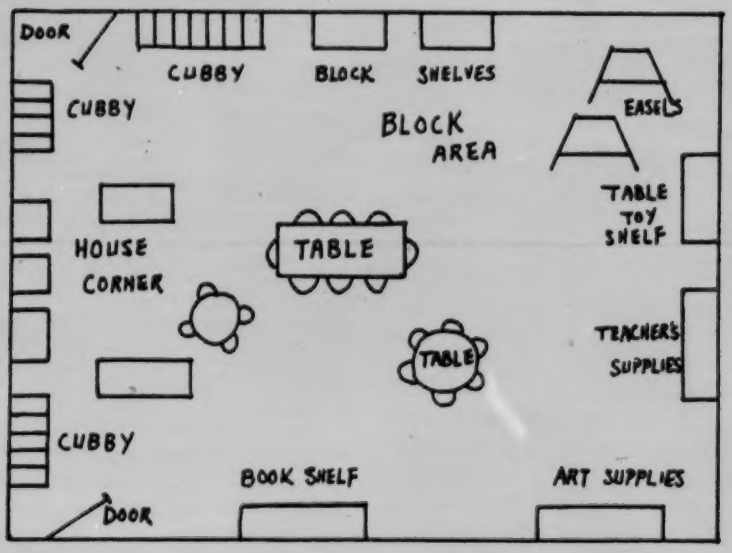
- Children running around the room.
- No response from a child who has misbehaved.
- A child who doesn't seem to be interested in anything.
- Children who are destructive.
- Children who can't share or take turns.
- Children who can't work alone.
- Children who scream for attention.
- Children who won't clean up.
- Children who take toys out but don't use them.
- Children who are easily distracted, don't stay with a task.

(B) <u>How different arrangements encourage different behavior</u>.

Keeping in mind the kinds of behavior listed above, consider the two floor plans on the following pages.

What types of behavior might you expect to see in these classrooms?

Floor Plan A



What do you notice about this room? What might you see happening in the Block Corner?

You may have noticed that:

-- the Block Area is open to the rest of the room.

-- there might be a lot of running around.

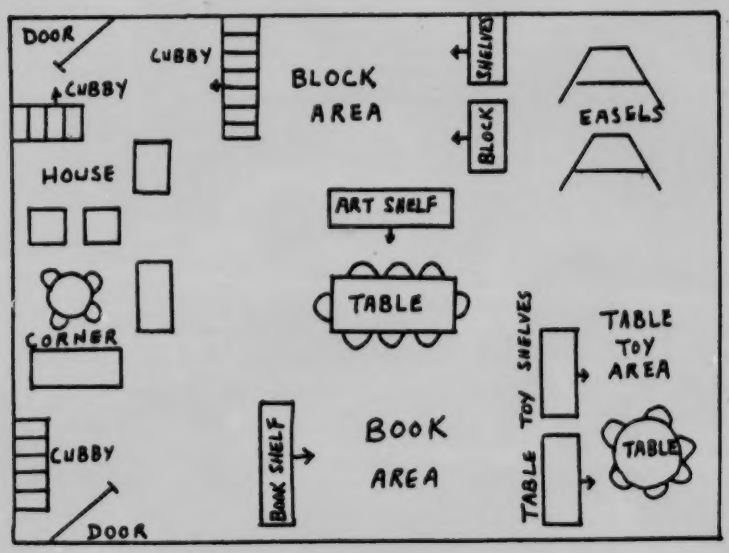
-- trucks might end up under the tables or easels.

-- children in the Block Corner could be distracted by other activities.

-- the noise from the Block Corner would not be contained.

-- the Block Area is in a traffic lane between the door and the easels or the table toys; this may lead to buildings being knocked down.

Now look at Floor Plan B.



This is the same room with the same furniture. No new furniture was added. It has only been rearranged. Consider the whole room but concentrate again on the Block Area.

Describe the changes. How do you feel about the room now?

_____

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All the areas including the one for blocks are more clearly defined and enclosed in Plan B. Having defined areas gives children an unspoken message of, "Here is the place for block play." This is important especially for the child who finds it difficult to stay at a task. If the child cannot easily see what is going on in all parts of the room, he/she is less likely to be distracted.

With enclosed areas, there is less wide open space to run around in.

Enclosed areas also give a feeling of security to young children. Sometimes a child who is too quiet and does not seem to want to do anything is overwhelmed by all the possibilities. Making several small spaces out of the one large space often helps this type of child feel more comfortable.

There will probably be fewer trucks out of the Block Corner here and fewer times when buildings accidently get knocked down because the Block Corner is out of the line of traffic.

Both the rug for the Block Area and the fact that the different areas are enclosed should make the noise of block activity less disturbing to everyone else in the room.

(C) Guidelines for a Block Area that will encourage development and learning.

We've just seen that moving some furniture around may help with all six of the problem behaviors we anticipated in Plan A. If you were to develop guidelines for planning

space in a classroom, what would you consider important?

_____

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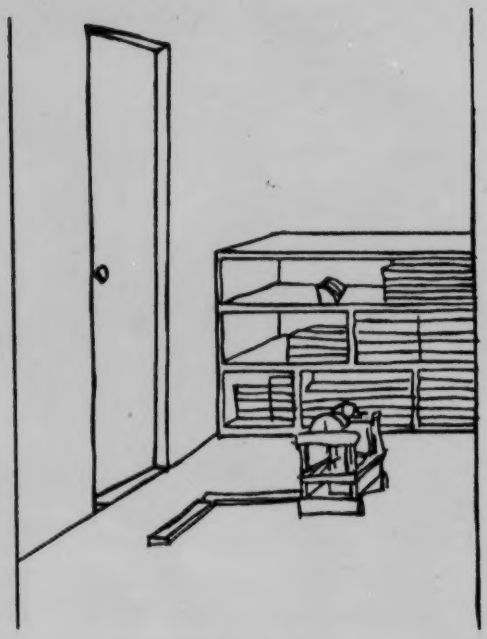
Some of the points teachers have made include:

- Quiet areas should be far from noisy areas.
  - -- The Block Area should not be near the Book Corner.
  - -- An appropriate place for block play would be near the House Corner to encourage dramatic play.
- Define areas clearly.
  - -- Children feel they belong in an area when it is clearly defined.
- Use shelves as dividers.
- Keep materials in the area where they will be used.
- The Block Area should not be located in the line of traffic.
- Materials used together should be kept together.
- Keep open traffic lanes between areas so children can move freely from one area to the next.

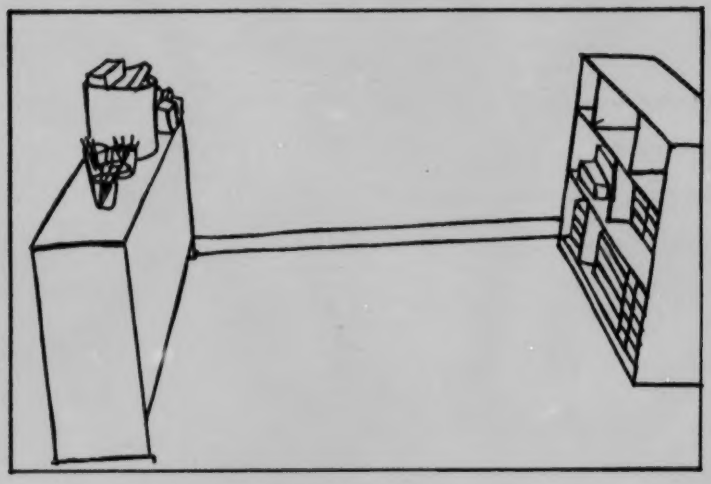
(D) Illustrations on arranging an area for block play.

1. This Block Area is next to the Book Corner, and the activity and noise may disturb children who are sitting quietly with books.

2. Where will children build in this room? There is a table right in front of the block shelf.



3. When the Block Area is in the line of traffic, such as near a door, building is often disrupted and children get frustrated.

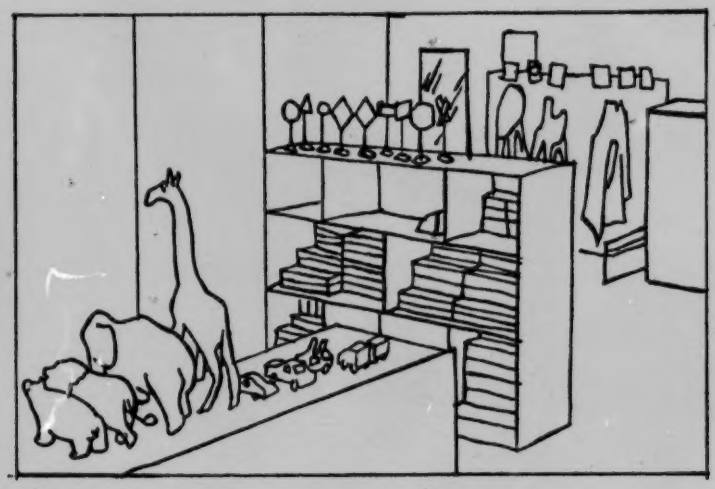


4. If the Block Area is too small, children have to build very close to each other and you will soon have problems.

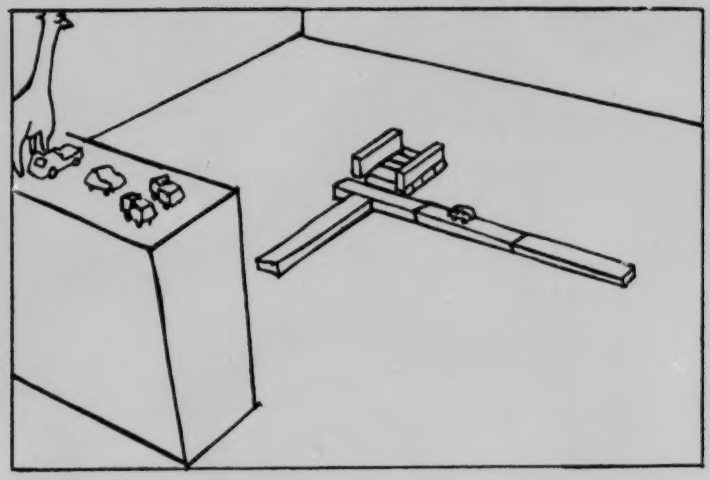
These pictures illustrate four DON'T's:

DON'T put blocks next to a quiet area.
DON'T put tables in the Block Area.
DON'T put the Block Area where people have to walk.
DON'T make the Block Area too small.

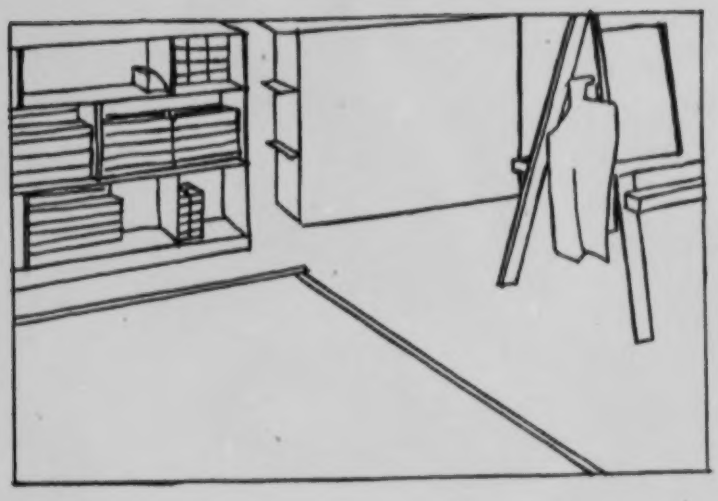
Here are some DO'S:



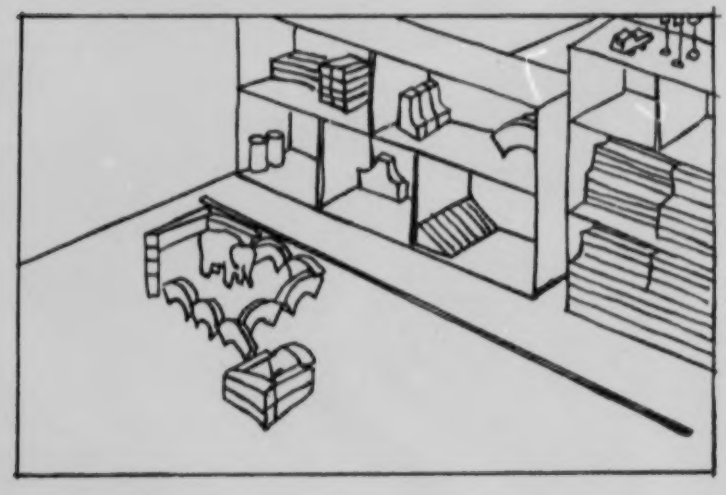
5. If you define the Block Area by shelves, it can be closed off from other distractions. Putting blocks next to the House Corner leads to dramatic play. Also, both areas tend to be noisy and you want to keep noisy areas together.



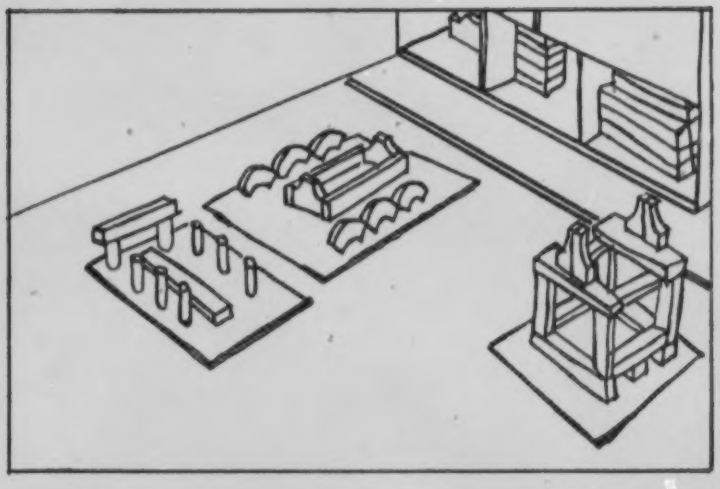
6. Indoor-outdoor carpeting is an ideal floor covering. It's comfortable to sit on (unlike linoleum) and yet blocks will stand up on it (unlike a shag rug).



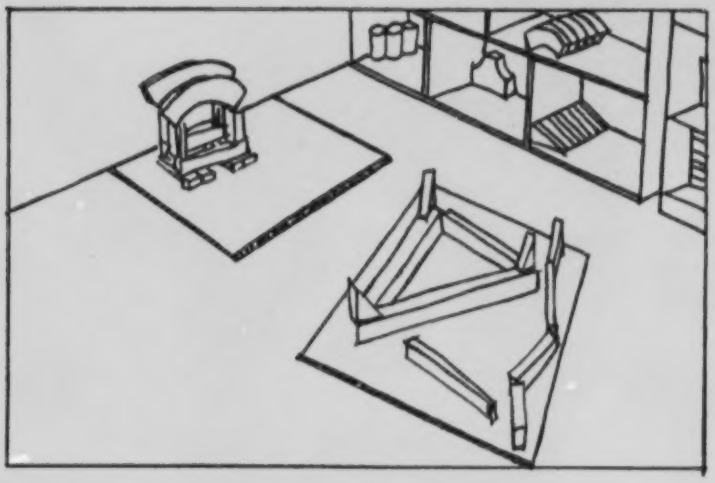
7. If you don't have a carpet or enough shelves to define the Block Area, masking tape can help to say, "Here are the limits to where block building takes place."



8. Putting a line of tape to define a "no building" zone near the shelves makes it less likely that buildings will be knocked down as children reach for blocks.



9. Tape can also be used to define individual building areas. That way children each get their own space and don't build too close to each other. Sometimes children make roads between their buildings. The tape can spark new interest in the Block Area.



10. Another way to make individual building spaces is with cardboard sheets. Thick cardboard also makes a flat building surface if you have uneven floors or shag rugs in your Block Area.

II-2. Arranging the materials for block play.

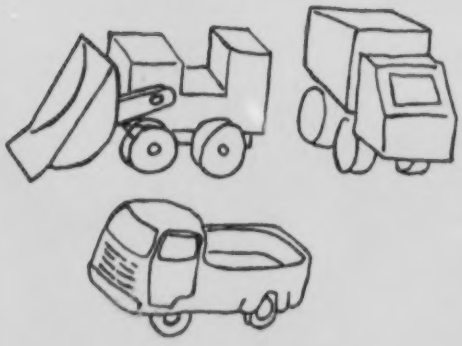
Setting out the space is only part of getting ready for block play. What materials you choose and how you arrange them are also very important.

(A) Accessories for block play.

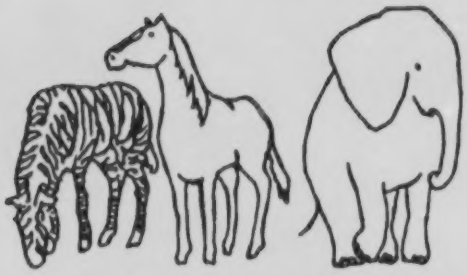
Playing in the Block Corner is more than building towers or laying blocks out end-to-end. Children can use their block constructions as settings for dramatic play. Block play is enhanced by having toys available to the children.

Typical accessories include:

- Transportation items: small cars, trucks, train sets, traffic signs. The cars should be small enough to fit well on a "road" made of the blocks.



- Rubber animals: farm set, zoo set.

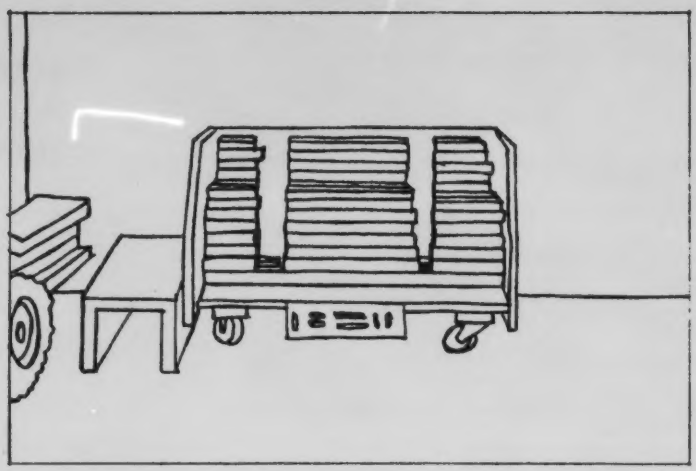


- Wooden people figures: community helpers. These sets now come with both "Black" and "White" people, but look carefully at the mother figures. Some have painted on aprons or babies, and cannot then go "off to work".

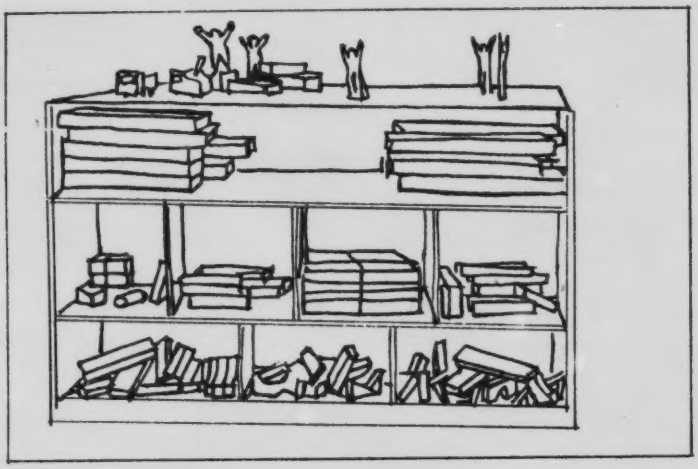
Lots of other items can be used as accessories. Imagination and some art supplies are all that is required to make your own props or to have the children make what they need. There is more information on accessories in Chapter IV on dramatic play.

(B) Illustrations on arrangement of materials.

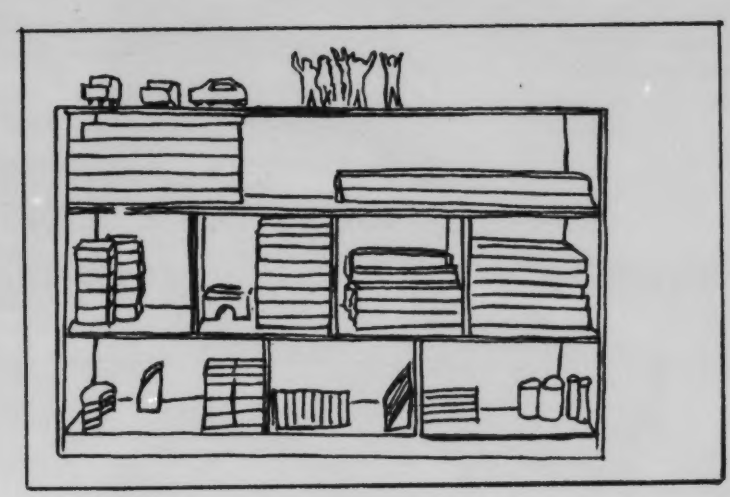
The pictures on the following pages give some ideas about putting out the blocks and accessories and labelling the places for them.



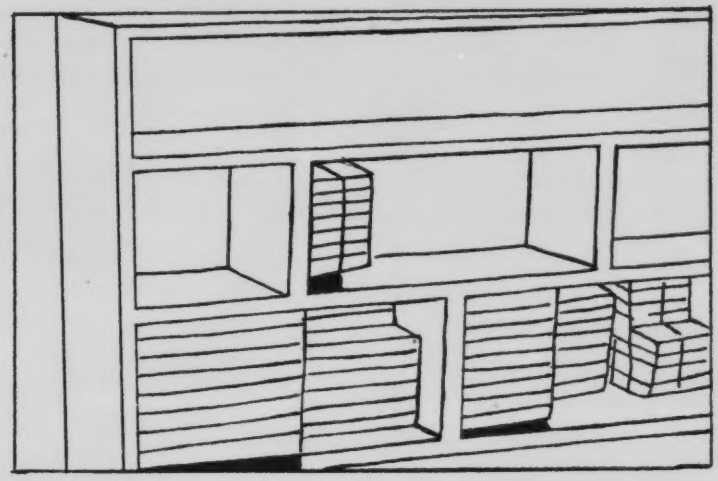
11. Some centers keep the blocks on a cart. This is easy especially for young children, but the children may spend more time pushing the cart than building.



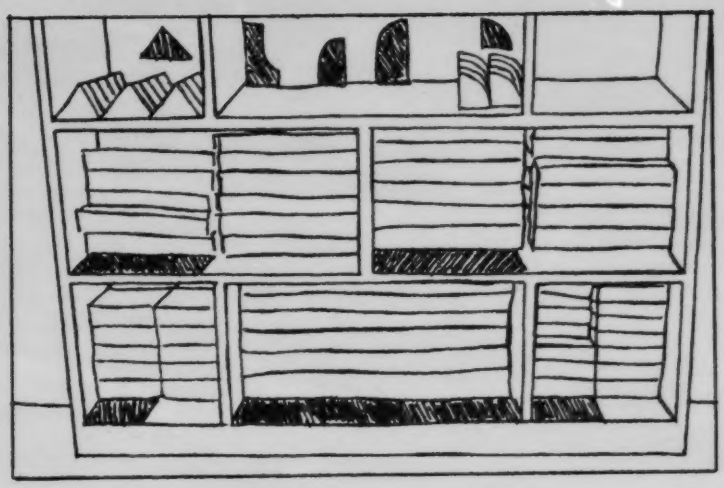
12. Blocks jumbled onto a shelf are not appealing. How can children find the blocks they need? This lack of arrangement invites children to pull everything out. The shelf sends the message, "It's OK to make a mess and to treat materials destructively."



13. Blocks arranged neatly on the shelf give the message that the teacher cares about blocks. But if all the blocks are out, how will the children know where to put them back?



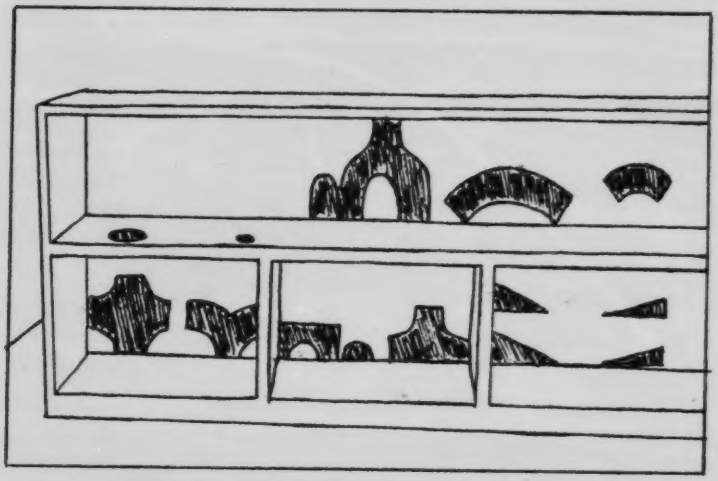
14. Contact paper outlines can be used to mark the place for each size and shape. The small selection of block shapes on this shelf indicates that this may be the beginning of the year. When the children are more experienced and have learned how to clean up, new shapes should be added.



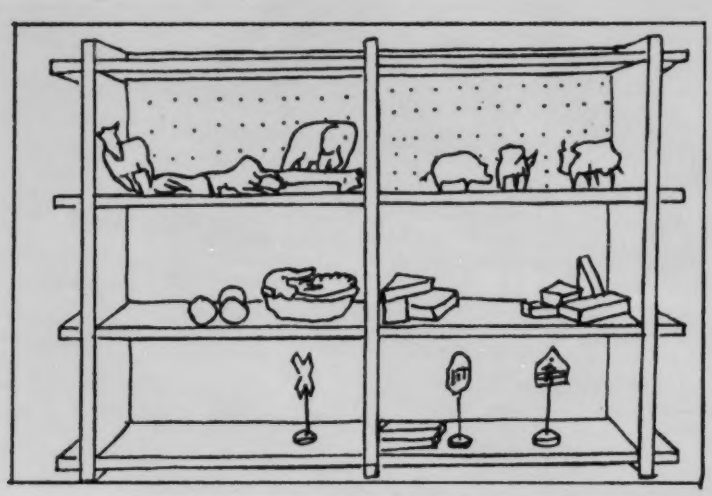
15. As each new shape is put out, a label is made for it. Contact paper outlines are better than magic marker because magic marker can't be removed. Contact paper outlines can be changed whenever you rearrange the blocks.

    If you put the blocks in lengthwise, the children can see which block is which. Looking only at the end, you can't tell the unit from the double unit or from the square.

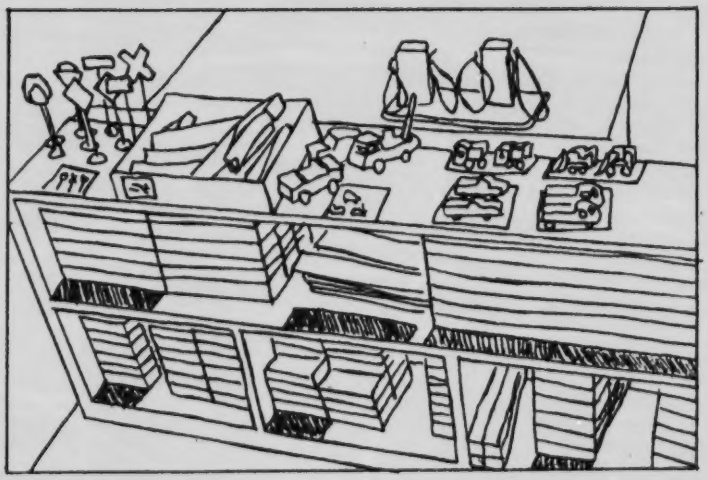
    The outline label should go in the left hand corner of the shelf. This helps to prepare children to read from left to right. For blocks which lie on the shelf, the label should go on the shelf itself.



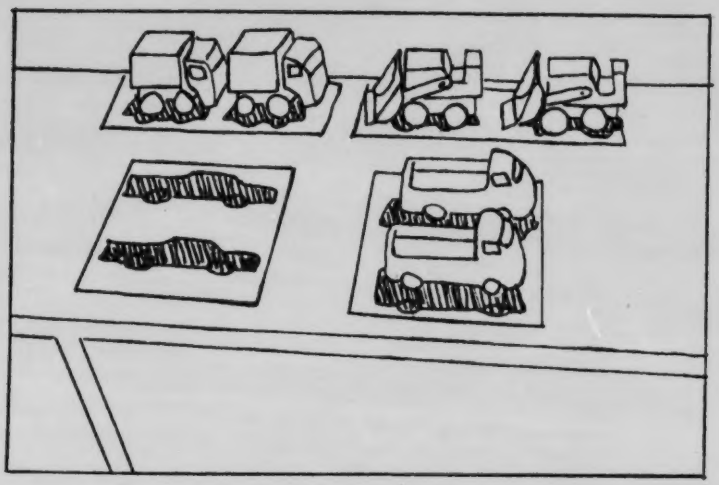
16. For blocks that stand up, the outlines go behind the blocks on the back of the shelf.



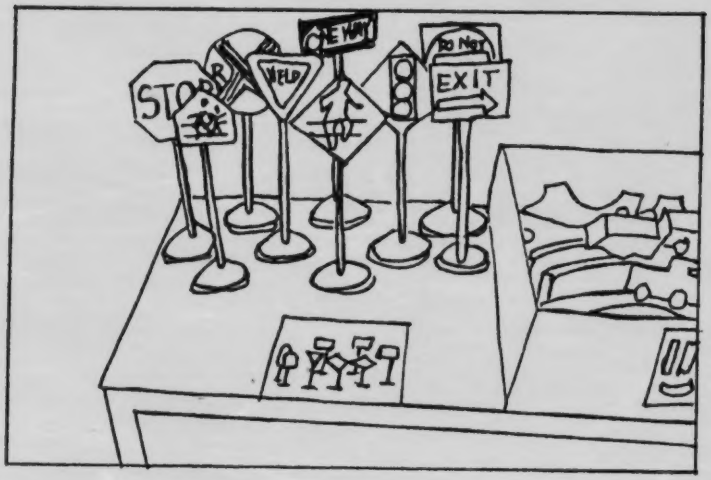
17. Not only do the blocks have a place, so do the accessories. Here the accessories are arranged haphazardly. This must be very confusing to the children. One way to help children make sense of their world is by thoughtful organization of the materials we put out in the classroom.



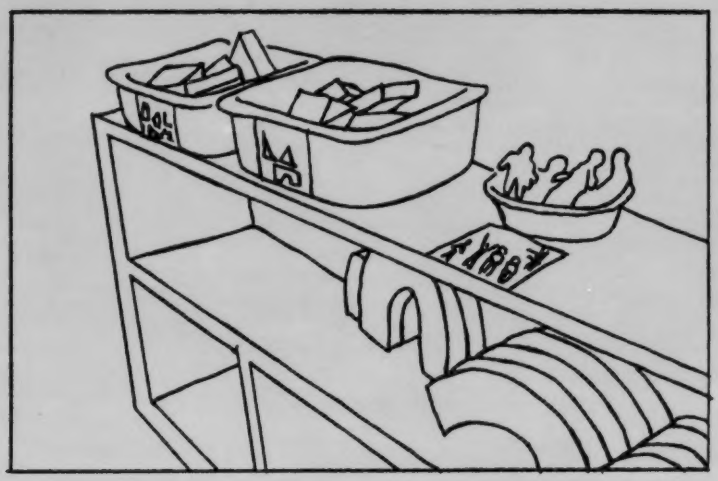
18. A selection of accessories such as the transportation toys shown here is more likely to be used constructively. There are two of each item to make sharing less of a problem.



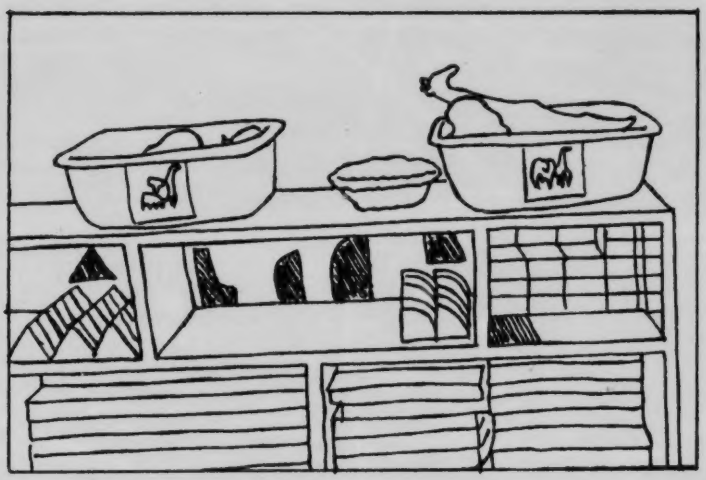
19. The place for each object is labelled. One type of label is a drawing. If the drawing is mounted on cardboard and covered with clear contact paper, it will last much longer.



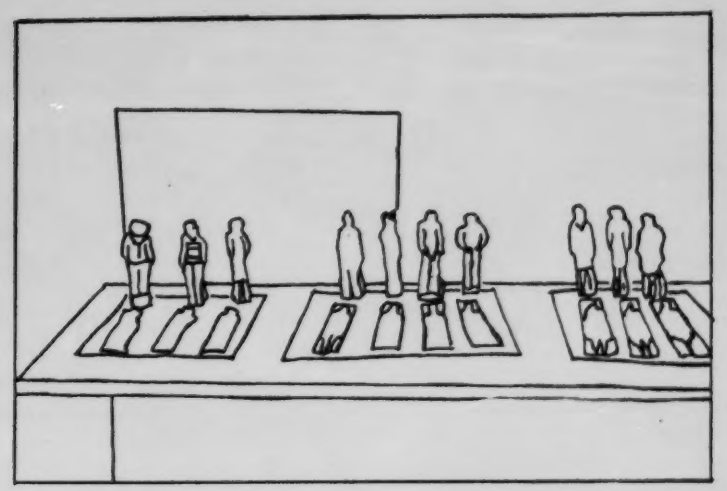
20. Another type of label is a photo. It can be mounted in the same way as a drawing.



21. Wash basins make good holders for accessories. The basin here has doll house furniture. The basket has people. Each set of accessories is labelled.



22. Farm animals and zoo animals can be kept in two separate basins. A photo of each group on the front of the basin helps children decide which group each animal belongs to. Clean-up becomes a sorting game.

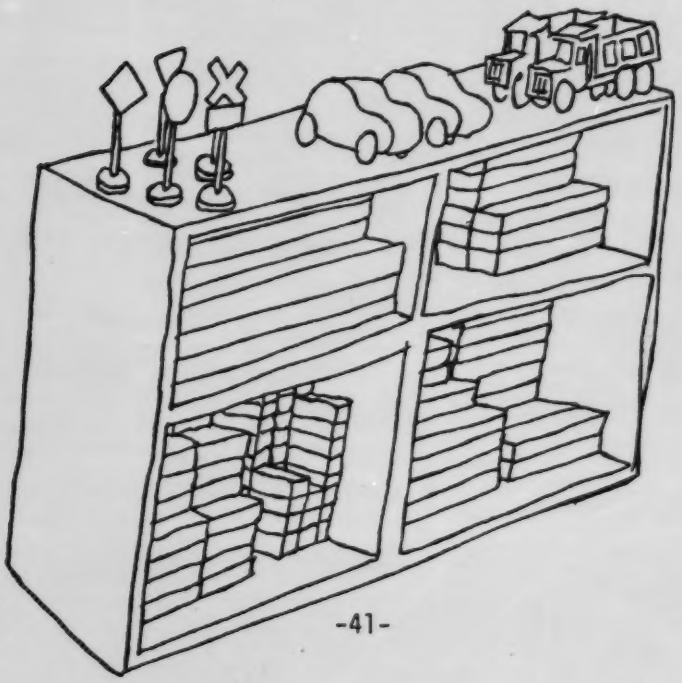


23. Labelling materials makes a matching game, and cleaning up the Block Area becomes a cognitive learning experience.

(C) Some questions teachers often ask:

(1) "How many blocks should I put out?"

For the Block Corner the basic material is of course the unit blocks; but you still have to think about how much to put out. YOU DON'T HAVE TO HAVE EVERYTHING OUT AT THE SAME TIME.



- Too much choice may overwhelm children who are experiencing blocks for the first time.

- New shapes can be introduced as children seem to need them for their buildings.

- Introducing a new shape may spark renewed interest in block building.

- If you have only a few shapes but many of each shape, you won't have so many sharing problems in the Block Corner.

(2) "What do I do when children can't share?"

Sharing is a common problem with young children.

We know this will happen especially

-- if the children are young (two's and three's),

-- if they have not been in a group situation before,

-- if it is early in the year, and they have not learned to trust the people in their new environment.

What can we do in the Block Corner to minimize the demands we place on children to share?

Some ideas you might try are:

- putting out only a few block shapes but many of each shape. As the year progresses you can add the other shapes. This also helps to maintain interest in the Block Corner.

- put out two of each accessory -- trucks, animals, people. One way to get duplicates is to share with another class. An example would be if one teacher takes both sets of farm animals and the other teacher takes both sets of zoo animals. After a few weeks, you can trade again with the other teacher.

- use a planning board to limit the number of children who can play in the Block Area.

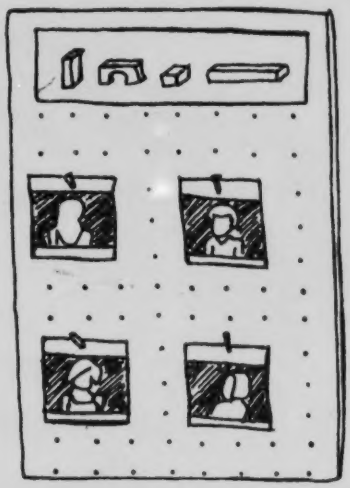
- use a timer to help children wait for their turn.

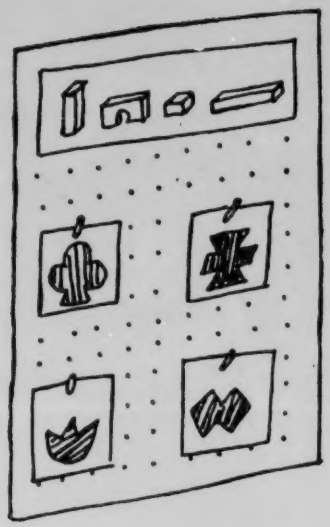
(3) "What is a planning board?"

A planning board is one way of telling the children how many can work in a given area and whether or not there is space available. It also encourages children to make a more conscious choice about what area they want to play in.

Each child has a card.

For young children this can be a photo of themselves mounted on cardboard and laminated or covered with clear contact paper. This helps the child develop a good self-concept.





Or you can use a symbol. The children quickly learn their own symbol and those of other children. A child's symbol can be used to identify other items, such as a cubby, drinking cup and cot. Learning this abstract representation is also a cognitive skill.

Later on you can print the child's name with the symbol.

The board itself can be made of pegboard or tri-wall. There should be some indication in a drawing or photo of what area (Blocks, Table Toys, Books) it is for. The planning board can be displayed at the entrance to that area.

If there is enough room and enough materials for only four builders in the Block Area, you would put only four pegs in the planning board for Blocks. For each area, you decide how many children can comfortably work there at one time. Then you put that number of pegs on the planning board for that area.

Planning boards help because:

- the child can see if there is room without asking the teacher.
- if the number of children is limited, there are likely to be fewer sharing problems.
- children tend to think more about where they will work and tend to stay in one area longer. They start to "plan" their own time. You will probably notice less running around when you use a planning board.

4. "How do I help children learn to take turns?"

Part of learning to share is learning to wait for a turn. For young children, five minutes can seem as long as an hour.

A child who is waiting may ask you every ten seconds if the five minutes is up. It isn't only that she/he is impatient; young children really have no idea of how long a minute is.

It helps if the children can actually see time passing.

Here are three ways to make time more concrete for children:

-- Children can watch the clock and tell when five minutes have gone by. The teacher would have to point out, "When the big hand gets to the 3, it will be your turn."

-- A kitchen timer with a bell is very good because even if the children don't watch it, the sound will tell them when the time is up.

-- An egg timer is fun to watch and makes it easier to wait for a turn.

II-3. Suggestions for further activities.

You might want to try some of these ideas to make your Block Area more of a learning center.

(A) Label the Block Area: use a solid color contact paper for the blocks. Use pictures or photos mounted on cardboard and covered with clear contact paper for accessories.

(B) Observe your children when they are building. Write a list of behaviors you see in the Block Area. Are there problems which might be connected to the space arrangement?

(C) Notice where your Block Area is: Is it near the House Corner or the Books? Is it near a door or in the way of traffic? Are the boundaries for block building clear? Try making a clearly defined enclosed area away from quiet areas, away from traffic. Watch what happens for two weeks. Has the new arrangement helped?

(D) Set up planning boards for each activity area and make a card for each child. Explain the system to the children and help them to get used to it. Watch what happens for two weeks. Are the children staying in one activity longer? Is there less fighting for space in an activity area?

(E) Visit other classrooms to see other settings. Exchange ideas with other teachers. Help each other to move furniture and to make labels. Share accessories to get duplicates.

CHAPTER III

THE TEACHER'S ROLE IN THE BLOCK CORNER

Topics covered in this chapter.

III-1. Getting children into the Block Corner.

III-2. Involving girls in block play.

III-3. Talking to children about their buildings.

III-4. Extending block building.

III-5. Teacher's role in resolving disputes.

III-6. Teacher's role in cleaning up.

III-7. Suggestions for further activities.

Goals for this chapter:

1. to learn some ways teachers can help children as they build with blocks.

2. to get ideas for involving children with blocks.

3. to learn what to look at in children's buildings.

4. to explore what to say to children.

5. to think about different goals and methods for resolving problems between children.

6. to get more ideas about handling clean-up time.

Introduction.

In this chapter we will address the concerns teachers have expressed about their role in the Block Area. The suggestions offered are practical and are based on a philosophy which can be summed up in these five statements:

- Children need to feel safe and successful in the room before they can handle lots of stimulation and choice.
- Children need to possess -- to feel they have had enough -- before they can learn to share.
- As children learn to control their own behavior in a simple environment, they will be better able to control their behavior in a more complex environment.
- Children can see differences that are obvious before they can make fine distinctions.
- Children learn simple concepts and then use these concepts to understand more complex ideas.

III-1. Getting children into the Block Corner.

Some children head straight for the blocks when it's activity time. Other children never choose blocks. Why do you think some children avoid the Block Area? The reasons may be varied.

Some children are:

-- scared to try new activities

-- not sure what to do

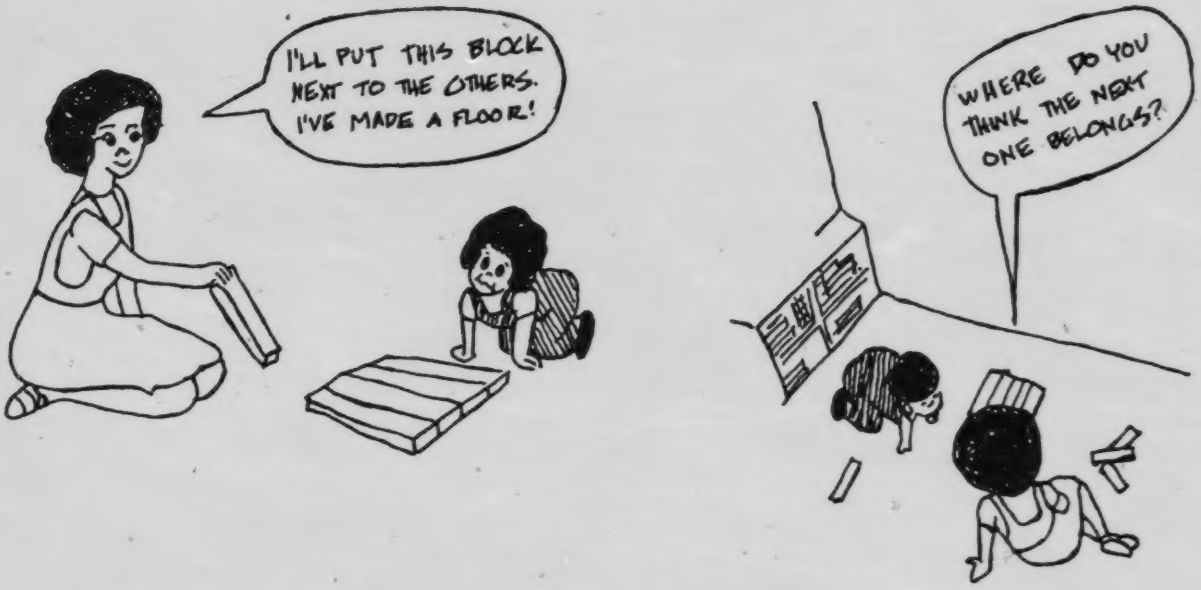
-- afraid of doing it wrong

-- afraid of the noise in the Block Area

-- too busy doing other activities

-- tied to set roles and see blocks as an activity only for boys.

Let's say there is a child you feel would like to play with blocks, but is shy, reluctant, unwilling; WHAT DOES THE TEACHER DO? Here is a skit of one teacher helping a child to get started in the Block Corner.



What did you notice about what this teacher did? What did she do and what did she say to make the child feel comfortable?

You might have seen that:

-- the teacher invited the child to join her in the Block Area.

-- the teacher sat down on the floor.

-- the teacher started to build. She let the child just watch at first.

-- the teacher described in words what she was doing with each block.

-- after putting three or four blocks down, the teacher asked the child to help with a decision about where to put a block.

These are all important steps in making a child feel comfortable in the Block Area. As the child gets to feel more comfortable

and successful in block play, the teacher can encourage more independent building. The teacher will have succeeded in giving the child the message that, "I value blocks. I value you."

III-2. Involving girls in block play.

In many classrooms you will see fewer girls in the Block Corner. Even if you do see two-year-old girls building, as they get older, the girls tend to leave the Block Corner to the boys.

Let's think about why this is so. If you know of some classrooms where girls do play with blocks and others where they don't, it might be helpful to try to figure out what is different in the two classrooms that might be causing this.

In many classrooms the boys enforce the Block Area as boys-only territory. They tell the girls in words and actions that they aren't welcome.

Girls often get the message both in the classroom and in the real world that construction work is for men. This may be one reason girls sometimes don't feel that they belong in the Block Corner.

Girls are often at an earlier stage of building than boys of the same age because they don't use the Block Corner as much. They don't have as much experience.

Try to think of some ways to get girls to be more involved in block play. What could a teacher try?

_____

_____

_____

Some ideas teachers have suggested are:

- You, the teacher, take the girl into the Block Corner to help her feel comfortable there.

- Support and encourage girls. For example, if a boy says, "That's just a baby thing she did. Girls can't really build," you might say something like, "In our school everyone makes their own buildings. Each one is different and that's what is special about them."

- Be sure that you show children you value all kinds of block structures not just those that look like real buildings.

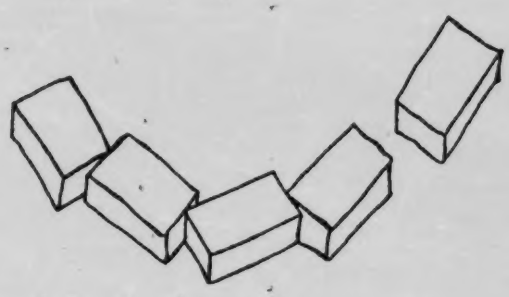
- Put up pictures of girls' buildings.

- Put up pictures of female construction workers.

- Read a book at story time about female builders. (Try: Mothers Can Do Anything by Joe Lasker, or Joshua's Day by Sandra Lucas Surowiecki and Patricia Riley Lenthall.)

III-3. Talking to children about their buildings.

One of the questions teachers often ask is: HOW DO I TALK TO THE CHILDREN IN THE BLOCK AREA? WHAT DO I SAY? It's easy when an older child has made an elaborate structure and wants to tell you all about it and what it's for. But what if a two- or three-year-old has made a construction that looks like this:



WHAT DO YOU SAY?

For most adults, the first tendency is to say:

"That's a nice building."

or

"You did a lovely job."

or

"Hey, I really like that."

But if you think about these statements, you'll realize that you've said nothing at all about what that child did. Those are really just empty words. You haven't shown the child that you really looked at his/her building.

Judgment statements are also very tricky. If you say to one child, "You did a great job," and to another, "That's a good building," will they both feel valued or will they wonder which one you like better? And what if you forget to say something to other children? Will they think you don't like their work? Praise is important to young children. They

want to please their teachers. You should always try to find something positive about a child's work, but also add a descriptive statement about what she/he has done.

The second sentence that comes to mind is probably the question:

"What is it?"

But what if the child hasn't thought of the blocks as being something? You may put the child on the spot. You're telling the child that blocks have to "make things."

Sometimes a teacher sees a structure in the blocks:

"You've made a train."

What's wrong with saying something like that? The adult has imposed ideas on the child. Maybe the child didn't make a train; maybe the child didn't make anything specific.

If we should try to avoid

- using words like "nice," "great," "good," "lovely,"
- asking direct questions,
- naming the structure for the child,

then what should we say? You could DESCRIBE WHAT YOU SEE. Tell the child you have noticed

- what blocks were used
- where the blocks were put
- how many blocks were used
- whether the blocks are all the same
- what you like about the design
- how the blocks are connected
- how the blocks are balanced.

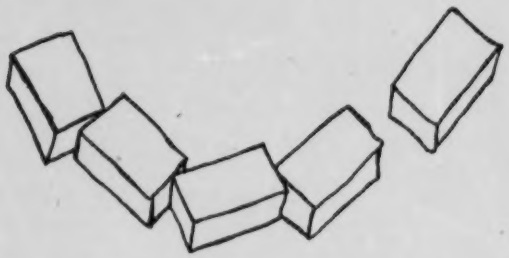
If you do this:

-- you are telling the child that you are looking carefully at the building.

-- you are giving the child new vocabulary, helping with language development.

-- you are helping the child to look closely at what he/she did.

Let's look at the same construction again.



What could you say that would DESCRIBE this structure?

_____

_____

_____

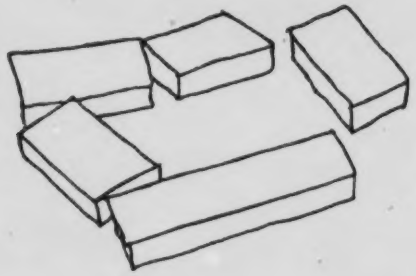
Maybe you said:

-- "I notice you used all the same blocks."

-- "You made your building go along the floor."

-- "Some places you made the blocks touch, but here you left a space."

Here's a different early stage block structure:



What might a teacher say about this one?

_____

_____

_____

Perhaps you'd say:

-- "I see that you used one block that is longer than the other."

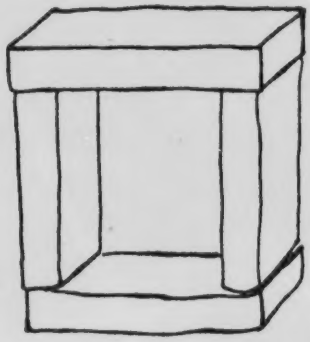
-- "Hey, your blocks make a space in the middle."

-- "All of your blocks except one are touching."

-- "You used five blocks. You made the whole building with just five blocks!"

-- "All your blocks are rectangles, but they're not all the same size."

Try it again with this block structure:



_____

_____

_____

You could say:

-- "You made the top block balance. That wasn't easy I bet."

-- "Some of your blocks lie down and some stand up."

-- "If I get down on my knees, I can look through it."

-- "You were very careful when you made this building."

You may have noticed that by the above comments you are not only valuing a child's work by showing you really looked at it, but you are teaching important cognitive concepts.

Teachers also ask:

-- "Can I ever ask a question?"

Try: "Would you like to tell me about it?" That's open-ended and allows the child to name the structure, describe it, or even say, "No."

-- "Can't I ever say what I think it is?"

Try: "To me it kind of looks like a _____." That allows the child to consider your interpretation without giving up his/her own.

-- "Can't I ever compare what two children do?"

Try: "I see your structure is different from Jane's. You made your blocks stand up and she made her's lie down. Her's all touch and yours are spread out." This points out differences without being judgmental. It values each of the children individually while pointing out concepts like "touch" vs. "spread out."

Some other questions you might ask are:

-- "How did you do that?"

-- "How did you feel doing that?"

-- "How long did it take to make that?"

Questions like these need more than one word answers. You are giving the child a chance to talk in sentences which is good language practice. You are asking the child to describe his/her personal feelings and accomplishments which helps to develop a positive self-concept.

III-4. Extending block building.

One important aspect of the teacher's role in the classroom is to help children extend their ideas.

In the Block Corner, you can:

- Get down on the floor with a child who is frustrated over a problem and offer encouragement while the child solves the problem.

- Say, "I have another block shape that might work there," and put out new blocks.
- Say, "If there are no more of that size block, can you find something else that will work instead," and wait while the child solves the problem.

- Offer a book with pictures to a child who has built the same construction every day for a week. An example might be Thruway by Ann and Harlow Rockwell for a child who has put down blocks in a row many times saying, "This is a road."

- Offer new accessories. For example, "Would you like these animals for your zoo?"

- Make children feel comfortable about asking for extra blocks or props.

There is a lot more about how the teacher can extend block play in Chapter IV on socio-dramatic play with blocks.

III-5. Teacher's role in resolving disputes.

Discipline is a concern of all teachers. Because the Block Corner is a potentially dangerous place, many teachers feel it is particularly important to be concerned with discipline there.

Each of us as individuals has a different idea of how to use discipline in a classroom. Even when teachers agree that they want to have an atmosphere free of anger, want to refrain from yelling at children, want children to learn how to control themselves and to solve their own arguments, these same teachers may disagree on how to accomplish that. And all people -- parents and teachers -- sometimes fail to live up to their own ideals. Despite our best intentions, we do sometimes get angry, we sometimes yell, we sometimes find it very difficult to deal calmly with a child -- often with one particular child in the class.

Problem-solving and discipline in the classroom are topics worthy of a whole course in themselves. We can barely touch the subject here. There are many approaches that a teacher can use.

Different methods may seem more effective with one child than with another. How a child reacts to your method of discipline in the classroom may have something to do with what the child

is used to at home. If you want to teach all the children to respond to the same ways of solving arguments, you have to expect that it will be easier for some children (those who are familiar with it) than for others (those for whom it is new and different).

As teachers, we each have to find a method of handling classroom disputes that we are comfortable with -- that fits with our personality, our cultural values, and that makes us feel good about ourselves. Another aspect to think about is what we want the children to gain from our discipline. Do we want the misbehavior stopped immediately? Do we want the misbehavior stopped permanently? Does the action we take to get immediate results also prove to be the best way to get permanent results?

Do we want children to learn to control themselves, to solve disputes among themselves with words and without the teacher? Is that possible without allowing chaos in the classroom? Reading about different problem-solving techniques and talking over our feelings about them with other teachers is one useful way to help clarify our own thoughts as well as to get new ideas.

Some good books to read about discipline and problem-solving with children are:

Comer, James P. and Alvin F. Poussaint, Black Child Care, Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1975.

Dreikurs, Rudolf and Vicki Soltz, Children: The Challenge, Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1964.

Ginott, Haim G. and Robert Markel, Teacher and Child, Macmillan, 1972.

Gordon, Thomas, Teacher Effectiveness Training, Peter H. Wyden, Inc., 1975.

Nimnicht, Glen, et al., "The Flexible Learning System - Competency Based Learning Units for Adults in Early Childhood Education," Problem Solving with Children, Far West Laboratory, San Francisco.

Rules in the classroom.

One way to reduce problems is to make some rules for the Block Corner. Setting limits is important to children. Children do respond to rules if there are not too many and if they are applied consistently.

Some rules teachers have are:

- only a certain number of people at a time can play in the Block Area. (The planning board discussed in section II is a good way to enforce this rule.)
- you may not knock down someone else's building.
- you may not throw blocks.
- you may only build as tall as you can reach. (Other teachers don't worry as much about this and allow children to stand on chairs to make taller buildings.)

But there can't be rules for everything. Situations will still arise where the teacher has to come in and help resolve a dispute between two or more children. Even if you've used all the ideas we listed in Chapter II for minimizing sharing demands, you may still have to deal with two children who want the same block or accessory at the same time.

Problem-Solving with children.

All of the books we have listed share a philosophy of discipline that is based on the following ideas:

- recognizing children's feelings
- reasoning with children
- helping children to develop skills in problem-solving
- helping children to take responsibility for their own actions

- teaching children to use words rather than to act out

- listening for the real messages in what other people are saying.

Teaching and parenting require many skills. Learning to use the problem-solving method of discipline requires practice for most adults, but teachers and parents who do use it find it very valuable. If you are interested in this approach to helping children to resolve their disputes, we encourage you to read one of the books we have mentioned. Courses in the techniques are given in many communities.

Some issues that teachers have raised in a discussion on discipline are:

-- Some teachers who have tried problem-solving with children find that it takes more time than they can give to two children when they have ten or twenty others to help. Some teachers allow other children to come listen and value the social skills all the children are getting.

-- One goal of these methods is to have the children learn how to resolve their own disputes. Some teachers, however, find it easier to solve the problem for the children.

-- Some teachers feel that a rule with a known punishment is more effective than talking things out with children. An example might be: If you throw a block, you must leave the Block Corner and cannot return for the rest of the day. From your own experience, does this work? Will the child who threw the block today come back tomorrow and play in the Block Corner without throwing blocks again?

-- Some teachers feel that it is important not to get angry at a child, to speak firmly but always calmly. Other argue that if you are angry, you should sound angry; that a child will respond to your tone of voice and behave.

-- Most teachers believe that it is never their role to hit a child, but some argue that a teacher can use spanking as an effective method of discipline for some children. Others feel that while a spank may curb misbehavior temporarily it does not foster their goal of making the child gain the self-control to handle his own behavior. The methods described in the books on our list teach how to deal with children without the need for spanking.

-- Hitting a child is not the same as physically restraining a child who is out of control. Most teachers feel there are times when certain children need to be physically stopped. This can be done by holding the child firmly with reassuring words such as, "I'm going to help you."

How do you feel about these different points?

What do you want the children in your classroom to gain from your discipline procedures?

What works for you?

Sign-Writing.

Problem-solving can be combined with a sign-writing activity. When the two children agree on a solution, each child gets a sign describing what has been agreed to. For example, in a dispute over a truck, one child's sign read, "Sandi will play with the red truck today," and the other child's sign said, "Kevin will have the red truck tomorrow."

Signs are extremely powerful, even when children can't actually read them. It says the teacher really cares and wants to be sure the solution is carried out. One teacher who tried the idea in her classroom explained how at first every child wanted a sign and it was a bit chaotic but that now it really works well and the sharing problem is much better.

Signs promote social development and cooperation because children ask each other what their signs mean. Some children wear their signs. Others are put on block constructions or on the walls.

Even a child who can't read can tell what his/her sign says. The message on it is very important to that child and is quickly memorized.

Signs are of course great for language experience and reading readiness skills. Children do learn to recognize some words. Some children want to write their own signs.

In the Block Corner there may be different types of signs:

- signs explaining how a problem was worked out
- signs to name buildings
- signs about not knocking down a building.

Signs are written in different ways.

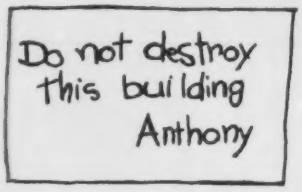
The words can be combined with a picture of the child and/or the object. The child draws the picture. In this way, sign-writing is also an art experience, a self-concept lesson, and develops cognitive skills in representation.

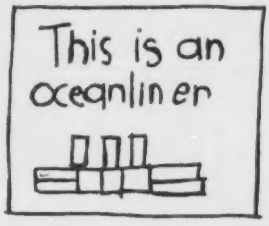
At first, the teacher writes the sign, reading each word aloud as it is written, and then reads the whole sign when it is finished.

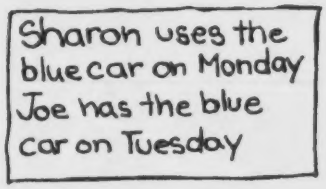
Later the child will write his/her own name and the teacher will write the rest.

Older children can begin to write their own signs.

At first, the teacher has to suggest writing signs, but soon children make their own decisions and ask the teacher to write it down. With two- and three-year-olds, most of the sign writing is about taking turns. Four- and five-year-olds begin to develop the verbal skills to solve problems, and want signs about that.







III-6. Teacher's role in cleaning up.

Clean-up is one topic almost every teacher mentions among Block Corner problems.

Why is it so difficult for children to clean up?

One reason may be that they are so involved in what they are making that it is very hard to stop. A five-minute warning said personally to each child (not just announced to the whole class) is important. It helps the children prepare for the time they have to stop.

But not only do we ask the children to stop constructing, we ask them to turn right around and destroy what they have made. This is hardest to do in the Block Corner. In Art or Table Toys, the children can usually finish something. In the House Corner, they have to stop but they can pick up in the same place tomorrow. But the block structures have to come down. This may be particularly difficult for older children who have planned constructions and want to play with them.

In Chapter I, we talked about sketches or photos to preserve buildings, but even when you do that the children may find it helpful to have a few extra minutes between building up and taking down.

What can you do? You can suggest having a "meeting". As at the beginning of the day, the whole class gathers at the meeting place with the teacher. Each person gets to talk about what he/she did. The teacher sets the tone so that each child feels important. You can talk about what you noticed and what you did during the work time. This helps children who are reluctant to talk at first.

Knowing that they will have this time to tell about their work encourages the children to be constructive during activity time so they will have something to speak about with pride. After the children have shared their experiences and have been away from the activity areas for a few minutes, it is easier for them to return to the materials to clean up.

Another suggestion for clean-up is to give children a choice about where they want to clean up. Everyone has to help but not necessarily in the same area where he/she worked. Some children who are reluctant to build with blocks may be willing to put blocks away. They can be introduced to a new area by helping with clean-up there.

III-7. Suggestions for further activities.

Try some of these:

- If there is a child in your class who is reluctant to go into the Block Corner, try to take the part of the teacher in the cartoon skit on pages 50 - 51. Tell about what happened.

- Observe the children in your class. Do girls play in the Block Corner as much as boys? Are there some girls who never choose blocks? Do you see or hear anything that gives you some clues as to why this might be happening? Try some of the ideas from pages 52 - 53. After a few weeks, see if girls play more often with blocks.

- Talk to the children about their buildings. Do you notice any difference in their reactions from when you praised them with phrases like "that's nice"?

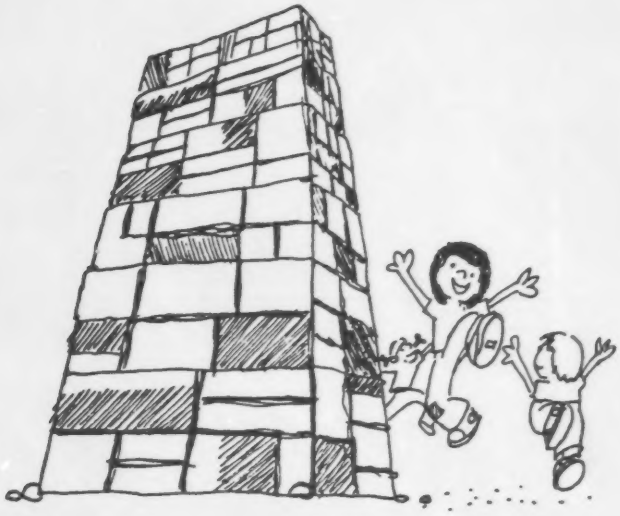
- Report on how you helped children extend their block building. What did you do? What effect did it have?

- Think about how you use discipline in your classroom and why you use the method you do. Read one of the books suggested. Try that method. Remember it takes a long while to change discipline habits. Don't expect results overnight.

- Introduce sign-writing. Do this for two weeks and watch to see if changes take place. Has it had any effect? If so, what has happened.

- Hold a meeting between activity time and clean-up. Do it every day for a week. Does it make clean-up easier? Do children seem prouder of what they did? Do children seem to have more interest in constructive activities?

- Allow children to decide where they will clean up and to choose a partner to help them. Do they always choose the same area that they worked in? Do some children choose block clean-up who seldom choose block activities?



CHAPTER IV

DRAMATIC PLAY WITH BLOCKS

Topics covered in this chapter:

IV-1. What is dramatic play in the Block Area?

IV-2. Accessories and props for recreating real settings with blocks.

IV-3. The teacher's role in fostering dramatic play in the Block Corner.

Goals for this chapter:

1. to consider how blocks can be used to recreate real-life settings.

2. to see how blocks can help children to relive and clarify experiences.

3. to learn how accessory materials can be incorporated into block play to elaborate on building scenes.

4. to explore how the teacher can be a listener, observer, facilitator to support and stimulate children's block play.

Introduction.

One of the important roles teachers have in all areas is helping children to develop their skills and to learn more than they already know. The next two chapters focus on using blocks to develop specific skills -- understanding the world through block constructions and mathematics and cognitive problem-solving.

IV-1. What is dramatic play in the Block Area?

Dramatic play can mean:

- recreating an experience
- acting out something the children have seen
- taking on a role (i.e., busdriver)
- seeing how it feels to be in control of an experience, to be something else

- trying out what a person does in a role (like a busdriver).

In order for children to engage in dramatic play, they must have ideas.

Children get ideas for play from:

- their own experiences
  - -- at home
  - -- in their neighborhoods
  - -- on trips with their families
- school trips
- books they've seen or heard read
- props that are available
- pictures that are put up in the classroom
- talking about places and people
- films and other audio-visual materials.

In an early childhood classroom, dramatic play takes place most often in the House Corner and in the Block Area. Think about the two areas and what you see happening there. What do you see as the difference between dramatic play in the two areas?

You may have decided that:

- in the House Corner the scene is already there, but in the Block Area the children have to create the scene first.
- setting up the scene is practice in putting your ideas into a representation -- you have to think out what you want and how you are going to show it.
- because of the setting in the House Corner, children usually play family roles. In the Block Area they take on a greater variety of roles.

Children create a variety of settings for dramatic play in the Block Corner:

-- zoo
-- farm
-- rocket ship
-- apartment house

-- airport
-- highways/tunnel
-- boat
-- railroad
-- cityscape
-- parking garage
-- "McDonald's" restaurant
-- firehouse
-- police station
-- stage
-- construction.

IV-2. Accessories and props for recreating real settings with blocks.

One of the ways to engage children in more dramatic play with blocks is to give them appropriate props. The accessories listed in Chapter II are basic to role playing situations. Just to review them:

- transportation toys -- cars, trucks, buses, planes, trains
- people figures -- families, community helpers
- animals -- domestic, farm, zoo.

In addition to these toys which are often found in centers, other props can be put out or made as the need arises. Some possible props are:

- doll house furniture
- traffic signs
- toy carpentry tools
- play money
- rug scraps

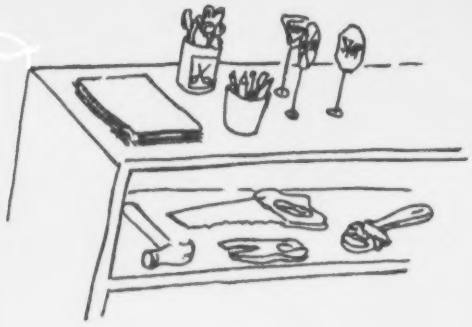
- paper, crayons, scissors
- hats (construction hard-hat, train engineer, police, etc.)

One question that often comes up is: Should children be permitted to bring toys from other areas (particularly House Corner, Table Toys, or Art) to the Block Area? How do you feel about that?

Some teachers don't mind, but others feel strongly that each area should stay intact. Clean-up is certainly more difficult when toys move from one area to another.

Many teachers maintain a strict rule about not taking table toys to the Block Area because they worry about lost pieces. One possibility is to keep in the Block Corner an assortment of pieces from incomplete table toy sets. Colored cubes and parquetry blocks are useful in decorating block structures.

In some classrooms, children may get art supplies (e.g., markers and paper) for use in the Block Area as they need them. If your set-up makes it difficult to allow children to get art materials whenever they want if they aren't working in the Art Area, you can set up a "prop supply" table or shelf next to the blocks.



On the following pages are some good suggestions for Block Corner accessories.

Block accessories.

From: Block Building -- Some Practical Suggestions for Teachers, by Maja Apelman (reprinted with the permission of the author).

A few accessories are usually supplied with blocks. They can be displayed on the blockshelves, or, if space is not sufficient, they can be stored in shoeboxes, each box labelled with a simple picture of its content.

- Basic Accessories -- found in most well-equipped classrooms:

  -- Transportation Toys: Cars, trucks, fire engines, boats, planes, trains (if space is sufficient).

  -- Simple wooden or rubber people (families and community helpers) and animals (zoo, farm and domestic).

  The number of these basic accessories is important: too few things tend to cause fights among the children; too many may interfere with buildings and encourage "hoarding."

  The number of accessories can be varied from time to time. It is best to start with a few basic ones such as one family, a few community helpers, 3-4 familiar animals, 6 cars, and 2 boats. When the need arises you can bring out additional things: fire engines after a trip to the local fire station; more boats after a trip to the river or a ferryboat ride; animals after a visit to the zoo; and so on. In this way, children are encouraged to use accessory toys meaningfully and to pay attention to the different functions of vehicles and people.

  -- Colored cubes are often considered part of the basic block accessories. Children love to decorate buildings with them. Any incomplete set of small blocks such as parquetry blocks or large Dominoes should be saved for the Block Corner. Also any other assortment of odd small blocks or spools can be put into boxes for decorative use with buildings.

- Additional Accessories (mostly for five-year-olds):

  -- Samples of tiles, linoleum squares, rugs. Children like to cover floor areas and walls of buildings with them, and enjoy making decorative patterns.

  -- Shells, such as scallop or clam shells: they can be used for "plates" when a child builds a restaurant (with food made of plastecene); or again for decorative purposes.

  -- Pebbles, small stones, little sticks for "cargo" on trains, boats and trucks. Children can collect these on walks to nearby parks.

  -- Variety of small containers. They come in handy for all sorts of things, such as keeping "money" in a "store," providing water for animals in a farm or zoo, etc.

  -- Furniture. Very simple furniture can be made at the woodworking bench (commercially bought furniture is either very expensive or very flimsy!) Children, however, should also be shown how to improvise furniture out of the blocks themselves.

  -- Familiar signs such as "one way," "stop," "school crossing," "bus stop," etc.

  -- Popsickle sticks (for attaching signs, for making fences, they will stand up if stuck into a small piece of plastecene).

  -- Thin pieces of rubber tubing. Tacked to a cylinder block, you can make a simple gas pump. Children will think of other uses.

  -- Excelsior makes good hay for farm animals.

  -- Trees can be made very simply: let the child draw a tree, cut it out, then staple it to a popsicle stick and stick it into a piece of plastecene so it will stand up.

  -- Pulleys with ropes and containers make wonderful "elevators."

-- Batteries and bulbs are very popular with five-year-old children who may wish to light up streets, or houses, make headlights for trucks, traffic lights, etc.

-- Any old piece of machinery, especially if it has switches or knobs that turn, can be placed in the Block Corner. An old TV antenna, e.g., or a broken clock, earphones or radio, will be used by the children in countless ways.

-- Save magazine pictures of bridges, roads, constructions, city scenes, and mount them on shirtboards or oaktag. Have them available for individual children who may need clarification when reconstructing something they have seen. Display them on the walls of the Block Area if your layout permits this.

-- Children love to have signs written for their buildings. If these signs can be saved and stored in a simple manner, they can be used again and children may begin to recognize some of them.

-- Five-year olds are very capable and independent. If manila and colored construction paper, a few crayons, scissors, masking tape, and string are always available in or near the Block Corner, the children will begin to make their own signs, draw trees, people and other things they need, and use their imagination in a constructive, purposeful way.

Note: The above list is meant to be simply suggestive. Obviously, no teacher will ever put all these accessories out at once. However, the larger your supply of odds and ends, the better you will be able to help the children in the Block Corner when they begin to need accessories for specific purposes.

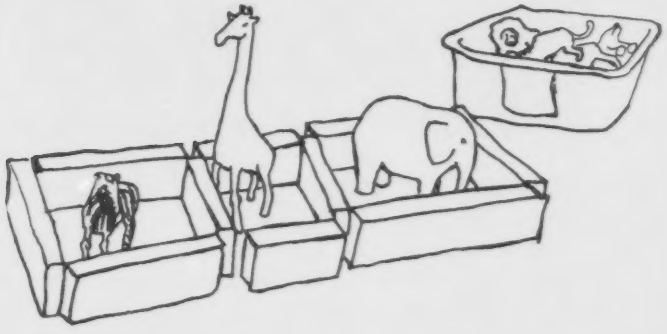
IV-3. The teacher's role in fostering dramatic play in the Block Corner.

How does the teacher encourage and support dramatic play in the Block Area? Sometimes the teacher can pick up on what the

children are doing and extend it. At other times, the teacher has to start the dramatic play, stimulate it, and stay involved at least for a while. Here are two case studies to demonstrate how children work out a theme with the teacher's support.

Example #1: Zoo

The builder began by getting the basket of zoo animals and some unit and double unit blocks. She built simple enclosures and put the animals in. There appeared to be little thought given to which animals went together.



At this point the builder seemed to stop. The teacher came along and the following dialogue took place:

Teacher: Is this the zoo?

Builder: Yes.

Teacher: Have you been to the zoo?

Builder: Yes, lots of times.

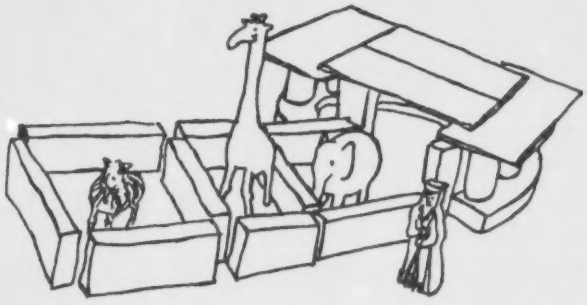
Teacher: What do you see at the zoo? What kinds of buildings do they have?

Builder: Cages for the animals -- where they can go inside and outside.

Teacher: It looks like you've made an outside yard for the giraffe and the elephant. Do they have an inside house too?

Builder: Yes. (She started to make one.)

When the teacher returned five minutes later, the builder had constructed a round house with a roof and an outdoor enclosure that did resemble the elephant/giraffe house at the National Zoo.



She was able to remember what these cages looked like because she had been there. If she had not had any ideas from her own experience, the teacher could have offered her a book to look through.

The builder has also gotten one of the community workers (the street sweeper) to be the "zoo keeper".

The teacher commented on these, showing that she saw what the builder had done and then made more suggestions by asking:

Teacher: Who comes to the zoo?

Builder: People -- families, children.
(She goes to the block accessories and takes 4 wooden block figures which she lines up in front of the building.)

Teacher: How will the people know what this building is?

Builder: It would say "Elephant House".

Teacher: I have some paper and crayons here. Would you like me to make a sign?

Builder: Yes.

The teacher made a sign and the child taped it on the building.

Teacher: How do people get to the zoo from their homes?

Builder: They drive in cars.

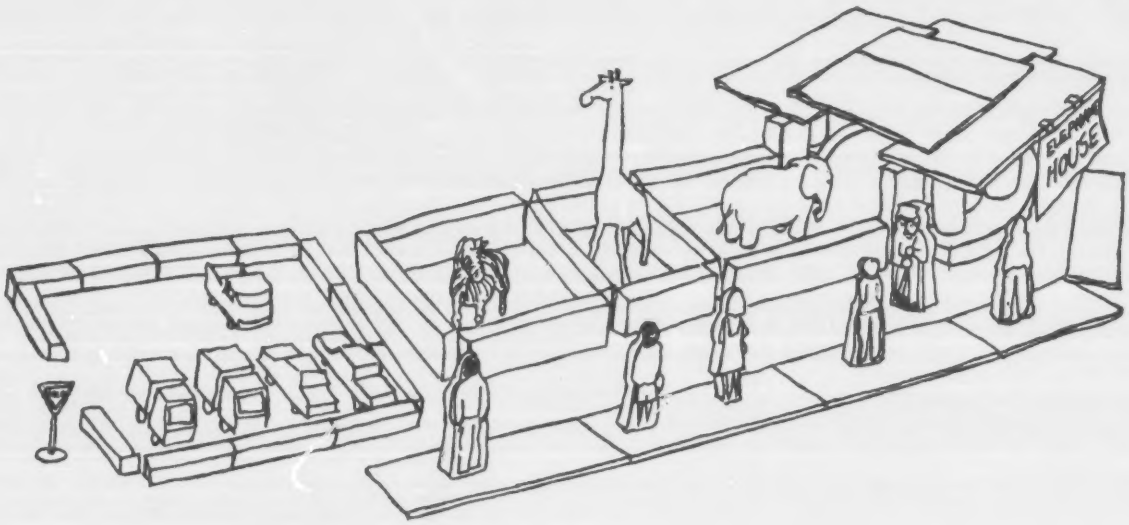
Teacher: And where do they put their cars while they walk around to see the animals?

Builder: There's a parking lot and it costs $1.00 to park there.

Teacher: Maybe you could make a parking lot for your visitors.

The teacher continued on to other building groups.

When the teacher returned again, the builder had added walkways around the building, a car parking area with cars. She asked for help making several other signs pointing the way to other buildings.



The conversation about visitors and naming the building has led the builder to think about the zoo from several perspectives --

who comes to visit the zoo, how they come, where they walk, and where else they could go.

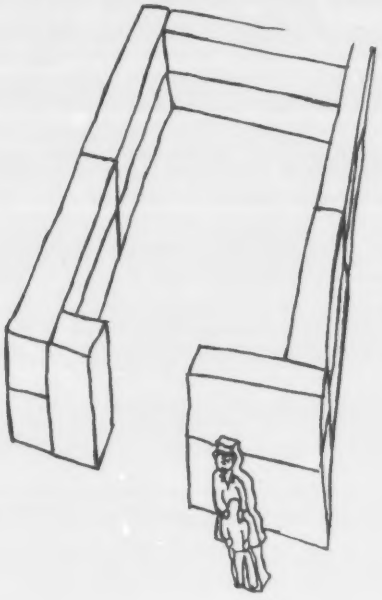
The teacher in this situation supported and extended dramatic play with blocks in the following ways:

- observing what the child did
- asking questions to help the child recall experiences
- listening to what the child said
- making suggestions based on the child's experiences
- helping by supplying props and writing signs.

In reading the second example, consider how the teacher looks, listens, and guides the play.

Example #2: Police Station

This group began by making a building which they declared to be a police station, but it had no particular characteristics except that they put the community worker "police lady" in front of it.



Teacher: What do the police do at a police station?

Builder 1: They have a jail.

Builder 2: They have the police cars.

Teacher: I have a book called Policeman, but it's really about police people because women can work there too. Let's look to see what they do at the police station.

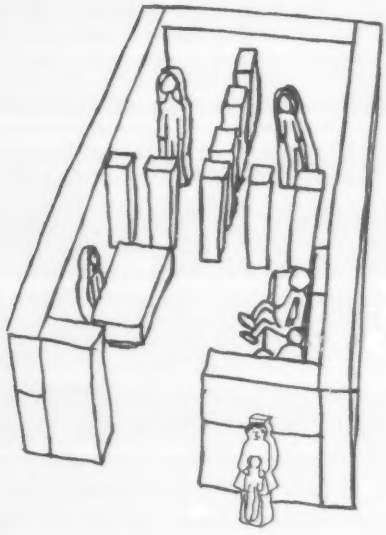
Builder 2: They sit at a desk.

Builder 1: There are benches for people to sit on.

Teacher: Is that in a separate room or out in the open?

Builder 1: On TV they are usually out in a big room.

Teacher: Do you think you could show that? (The builders began to get small blocks to fit inside the large building.)



The police station now had a jail cell, a bench for prisoners, and a policewoman at her desk. The teacher wanted to help the children

expand their concepts of what police do.

Teacher: Can you think of other things police do besides arrest people?

Builder: They give traffic tickets.

Teacher: Yes, they do; and what happens at the police station when someone comes about a traffic ticket?

Builder: We could have a booth for paying.

Teacher: Would you need some money for making change and how about a place to keep that money?

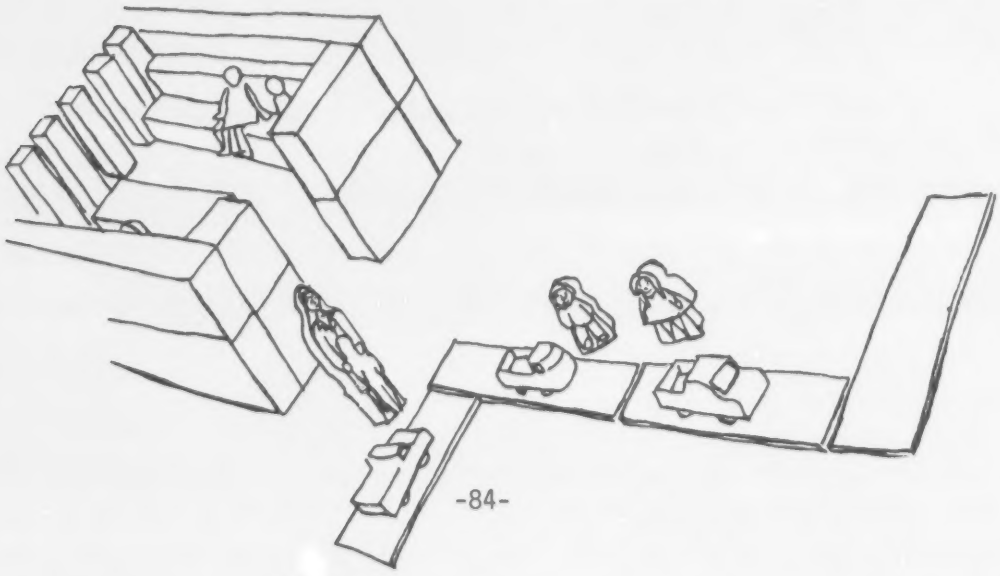
One builder started to make a street outside the police station with cars and a police lady.

Teacher: Where is her ticket book? Is she just standing there or is she going to give that car a parking ticket?

Builder: He's getting a ticket.

Teacher: Why is he getting a ticket?

This could lead to a discussion of why cars get tickets and what "illegal" means. At the same time, the third builder got some children figures and a police person and set her up as a street crossing guard. When this group of builders had to stop, their police station scene looked like this:



In this second example, the teacher used a book to help children recall and discover information they could use in their block play. It is a good idea to have books and pictures available when you see an appropriate moment to use them in helping children clarify concepts. A list of books with good pictures and content for stimulating play with blocks follows.

- Transportation:

  -- Airplanes and Trucks and Trains, Fire Engines, Boats and Ships and Building and Wrecking Machines, by George Zaffo, New York, Grosset and Dunlop, 1966.

  -- Have You Seen Roads?, by Joan Oppenheim, New York, Young Scott Books, 1969.

  -- Thruway, by Anne and Harlow Rockwell, New York, Macmillan Co., 1972.

  -- Transportation, by Etta Ress, Minnesota, Creative Education Society.

  -- Truck Drivers, What Do They Do?, by Carla Greene; pictures by Leonard Kessler, New York, Harper and Row, 1967.

  -- Ben's Busy Service Station, by Jane Barr; illustrated by Chauncey Maltman, Chicago, Albert Whitman and Co., 1956.

- Bridges and Boats:

  -- The Little Red Lighthouse and the Great Grey Bridge, by Hildegarde H. Swift and Lynd Ward, New York, Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1942.

  -- Who Built the Bridge, by Norman Bate, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954.

  -- The Boats on the River, by Marjorie Flack, New York, Viking Press, 1946.

- Airports:

  -- Behind the Scenes At An Airport, by David Cooke, New York, Dodd, Mead and Co., 1965.

  -- This Is An Airport, by Richard Bagwell, New York, Follett Publishing Co., 1967.

- Firepeople:

  -- About Firemen, by Jane Hefflefinger and Elaine Hoffman; illustrated by Robert Bartram, Chicago, Melmont Publishers, 1957.

  -- Ladder Company 108, by Rona Beame, New York, Julian Messner, 1973.

  -- Let's Find Out About Firemen, by Charles and Martha Shapp, New York, Franklin Watts, 1962.

- Policepeople:

  -- Let's Find Out About Policemen, by Charles and Martha Shapp, New York, Franklin Watts, 1962.

  -- Policemen, by Ira Dillon, Los Angeles, Melmont Publishers, 1957.

- Doctors and Hospitals:

  -- Curious George Goes to the Hospital, by Margaret Rey, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1966.

  -- Let's Find Out About the Hospital, by Eleanor Kay, New York, Franklin Watts, 1971.

  -- My Doctor, by Harlow Rockwell, New York, Macmillan Publishing Co., 1973.

  -- The First Book of Hospitals, by Harold Coy, New York, Franklin Watts, 1964.

- Post Office:

  -- At the Post Office, by Lillian Colonius and Glenn W. Schroeder, Chicago, Melmont Publishers, 1967.

  -- Behind the Scenes at the Post Office, by Alfred Lewis, New York, Dodd Mead Co., 1965.

- City Scenes:

  -- Dear Garbage Man, by Gene Zion, New York, Harper and Row, 1957.

  -- Let's Go Watch A Building Going Up, by J. Godspeed, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1956.

  -- Let's Look Under the City, by Herman and Nina Schneider, New York, W. R. Scott and Co., 1954.

  -- The Park Book, by Charlotte Zolotow; pictures by H. A. Rey, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1944.

  -- Wake Up City, by Alan Tresselt, New York, Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Co., 1957.

- Farms:

  -- Farms, by Robert Howard, New York, Franklin Watts, 1967.

  -- The Farmer and His Cows, by Louise and Richard Floether, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957.

  -- Animal Doctors, What Do They Do?, by Carla Greene; pictures by Leonard Kessler, New York, Harper and Row, 1967.

- Miscellaneous:

  -- A House Is For Everyone, by Jo Lowrey and Betty Miles, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1958.

-- I Want To Be --- (series) by Carla Greene, Chicago, Children's Press.

-- Mommies At Work, by Eve Merriam, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1961.

-- Daddies, What They Do All Day, by Helen Walker Pruner, New York, Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Co.

-- Katy and the Big Snow, by Virginia Burton, Boston, Houghton, Mifflin.

-- While Susie Sleeps, by Nina Schneider New York, W. R. Scott and Co., 1948.

CHAPTER V

MATHEMATICS AND PROBLEM SOLVING IN BLOCK PLAY

Topics covered in this chapter:

V-1. Discovering mathematics through block play.

V-2. Solving construction problems in block play.

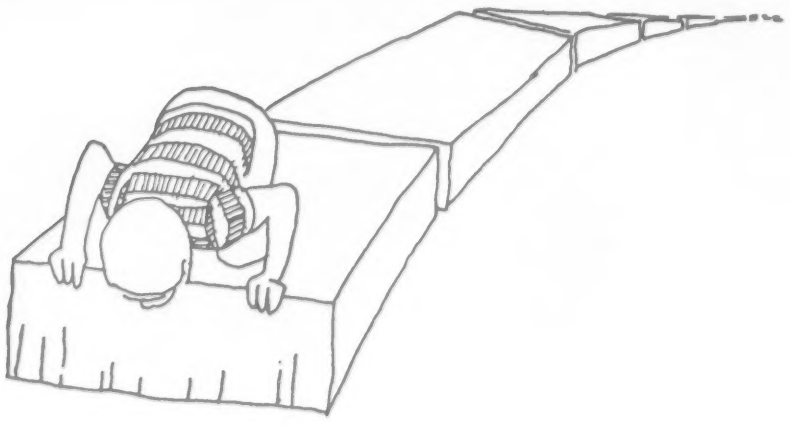
V-3. Suggested activities for teachers.

Goals for this chapter:

1. to learn about some mathematical skills children can develop from block play.

2. to learn some ways the teacher can help develop children's language and thinking skills.

3. to learn about some of the building problems children come up against and what children can learn from solving their problems.



V-1. Discovering mathematics through block play.

Unit blocks are designed to teach many concepts children need to have in order to learn mathematics.

Remember that the blocks themselves are made in mathematical proportions. For example, one unit is exactly the same size as two squares and two units equal one double unit.

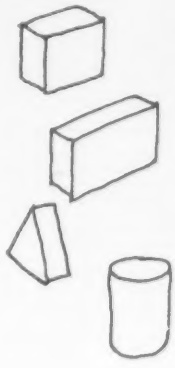
Some of the concepts children can learn from blocks are:

- more and less
- taller and shorter
- twice as big
- half as long
- how to name shapes: square

  rectangle

  triangle

  cylinder



- how to count:

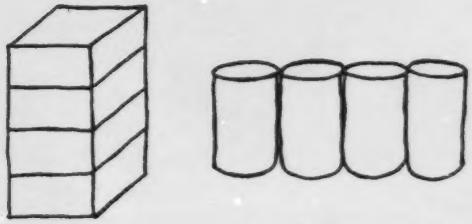
  3 squares

  4 cylinders.

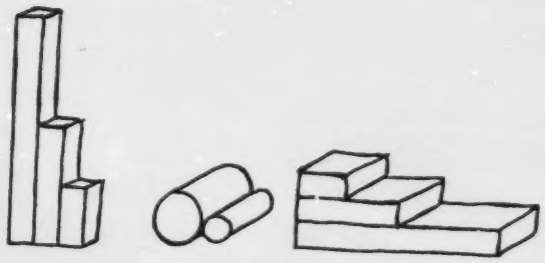
They can also learn skills like

- putting blocks that are alike together in a group (for example, piling up squares or lining up cylinders.) This skill is called "classification" or "grouping". At a more

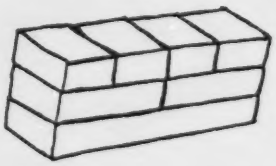
advanced level, children can name the different groups. "I put the squares here and the cylinders there."



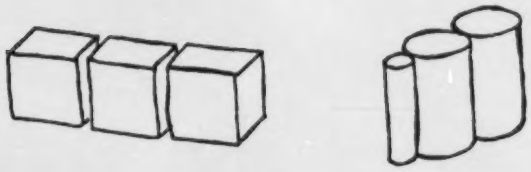
- putting items in order (for example, by height from shortest to tallest). This is called "seriation" or "ordering".



- noticing relationships between different blocks (for example, that four squares fill the same space as two units which fill the same space as one double unit). This is "equivalence".



- knowing that two groups have the same number of blocks even if they don't look exactly the same.



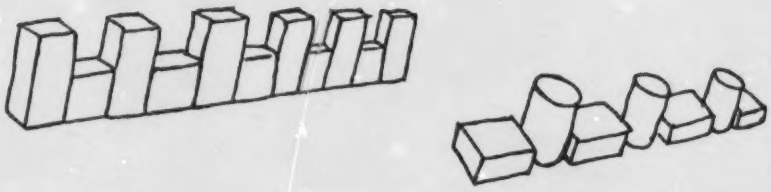
This is "conservation of number".

Skills like grouping, ordering, knowing when groups are equivalent are basic thinking skills that all children need to develop. Blocks are one of the best materials for helping children to learn them.

Some of this knowledge the children get by playing with the blocks without any help from a teacher.

You may have seen children:

- put blocks into groups, for example, squares in one place, units in another.
- set out blocks in a deliberate order - like smallest to longest.
- find out that two squares fill the same length as one unit block.
- find out how many of one type of block it takes to fill a space (for example, build a road from one end of the Block Corner to the other).
- make a pattern that goes on and on and on. (Such as alternating block shapes.)



When they do any of these things, the children are learning mathematics in their block play.

What the children cannot discover from the blocks themselves are names and the words they need to describe what they have found out. This is where the teacher has a major role in the mathematics learning the children will get from block play. In Chapter III we talked about what to say to a child in the Block Corner and we suggested describing what you see.

Descriptions build a child's vocabulary. Descriptions give children the words to name their discoveries. Sometimes the child hasn't realized the discovery he/she has made. When teachers describe what they see, it can help the children realize they have learned something. While block play by itself leads to discoveries about mathematics, teachers can help both language development and mathematics skills by talking to the children about their buildings.

Some examples might be:

"You found out that two of these blocks make one long block."

"Your building is as tall as the shelf."

"Yesterday you built a tall building and today your building is a long one."

"All the blocks in your road are the same size."

"You used four blocks to make a big square."

Asking questions is also a way to develop children's language and thinking skills. When the teacher asks a question, the children look at the blocks and notice for themselves what they have done.

Some examples of questions are:

> "How did you make a circle? We don't have any round blocks."
>
> "How many ways can you make a line of blocks as long as this one block?"
>
> "How many blocks did you use? Can you count them?"
>
> "Is this pile shorter or taller than that one?"

Teachers can help children discover mathematical principles in blocks in different ways and at different times.

Some other suggestions we've heard from teachers are:

- Use clean-up for teaching the words children need. For example, "This is a square. Would you please put the squares away? They go here where this square label is."
- Use clean-up for teaching numbers to children. For example, "I'm going to hand you two blocks at a time."
- Offer help when a child is stuck. "I see you'd like more long blocks. There are no more left, but you might try using two of these instead."
- Expand on what the child is doing. For example, offering a string to measure the sizes of different buildings.

V-2. Solving construction problems in block play.

As children build, construction problems may come up. The road builder wants a ramp or a tunnel or a bridge. The house builder wants to make stairs or windows.

Solving problems like this can be a major challenge. A child may work at this task with great determination for a very long time because he/she is self-motivated. The child created the problem and the need to find an answer comes from within.

The child has to think about the problem, to experiment with possible solutions, perhaps trying several different ideas. The sense of pride that comes with success is a tremendous boost to a child's self-concept.

It isn't easy to figure out how to make a ramp, or balance a bridge, or build stairs. Try it yourself and you will see! It takes a lot of thinking, concentration, and task persistence.

Many teachers ask, "When is it appropriate for an adult to help a child who is working out a building problem?" There is no "answer" to this question, but some ideas to think about are:

- let the child work out the problem alone if he/she doesn't seem frustrated.
- wait for the child to ask for help.
- give encouragement, "You're working very hard on trying to make that. Getting that to balance is very hard work."
- if the child seems frustrated or is getting angry or says, "I can't do it", offer to help. "You're trying to do something that's pretty hard to do. Let's see if we can work it out together."
- praise the child's success, "You made the bridge! It looks pretty sturdy, too."
- show the child a picture of a real building that has that structure so he/she can see what it might look like.

Once children have solved a problem that they worked on for a while, they may well build the same thing over and over again. Have you noticed this in your classroom?

Then when they have practiced their new discovery for as long as they need to, they may add on to it, expand it or try variations of it.

V-3. Suggested activities for teachers:

- Watch the children at block play. Do you see
  - -- a child trying to work out how to make a particular structure?
  - -- a child making the same kind of structure that he/she has already made many times?
  - -- a child adding some new ideas to the kind of structure he/she has built before?
- Try yourself to make one or more of these structures:
  - -- a ramp leading to a bridge
  - -- 5 steps leading to a building
  - -- a house with windows and a roof.

CHAPTER VI

OTHER TYPES OF BLOCKS

Topics covered in this chapter:

VI-1. Cardboard block : what they are; where to get them; uses and limitations.

VI-2. Table blocks and Lego.

VI-3. Hollow blocks: what they are; where to get them; how hollow block play differs from unit block play; space for hollow blocks; and safety with hollow blocks.

VI-4. Home-made blocks: wooden blocks; blocks from milk cartons.

VI-5. The care of wooden blocks.

VI-6. Suggested activities for teachers.

Goals for this chapter:

1. to become acquainted with other types of blocks besides unit blocks.

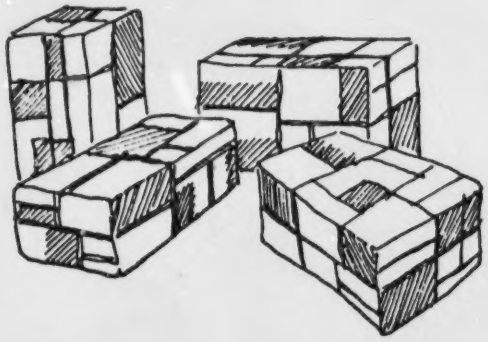
2. to become acquainted with large hollow blocks.

3. to learn one way to make your own blocks from milk cartons.

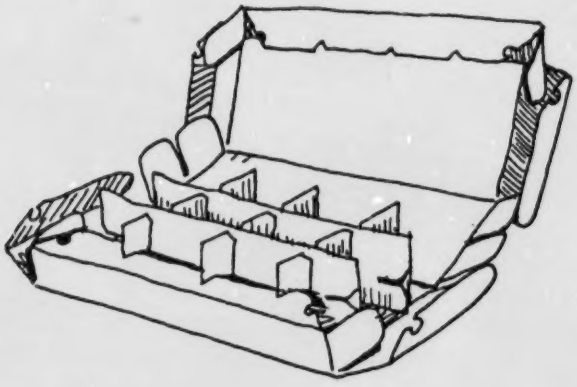
4. to learn some ideas for caring for blocks.

VI-1. Cardboard blocks: what they are; where to get them; uses and limitations.

Cardboard blocks look like large red cardboard bricks. They are called Blockbusters and are made by Burr, Inc., Hasbrouck Heights, New Jersey. They come in sets of twelve.



Blockbusters are very sturdy. They are made from heavy corrugated cardboard with an interlaced divider inside (as in a liquor box).



These cardboard blocks are especially useful with very young children. They are large enough for children whose fine muscle skills are not highly developed and yet light enough for even two-year-olds to carry around. They are not expensive. They

are less dangerous than wooden blocks when a block is thrown or a building knocked down. On the other hand, these particular blocks are limited in their building potential because they are all the same size and the brick like pattern tends to make the child build only "houses".

VI-2. Table blocks and Lego.

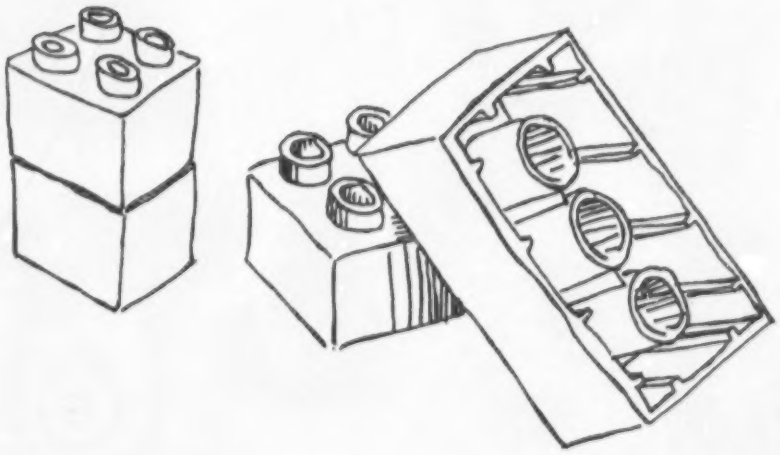
Many of the skills associated with block building can also be learned from smaller blocks.

In many centers these blocks are kept with the table toys. Two commercial sets of small blocks are those from Playskool and Childcraft. Playskool blocks come either plain or colored. Young children do enjoy the colors. Childcraft makes a set of plain wood blocks with the same mathematical relationships as the unit blocks but on a smaller scale.

Children go through the same stages in working with table blocks as they do with unit blocks. Sometimes a child who

does not choose to go to the Block Corner will play with the smaller table blocks. The child does not need to get down on the floor and can work in a more confined space. Because young children do enjoy these small blocks, they are a good toy to introduce early in the year. The smaller blocks are also useful for developing fine motor skills.

There are also several kinds of snap-together construction toys such as Lego. These foster many of the same skills and children go through the same stages. Most of these go with the table toys but the large Lego called "Pre-school" size might be appropriate to keep in the Block Corner. Constructions made from these sets often fit into a unit block scene.

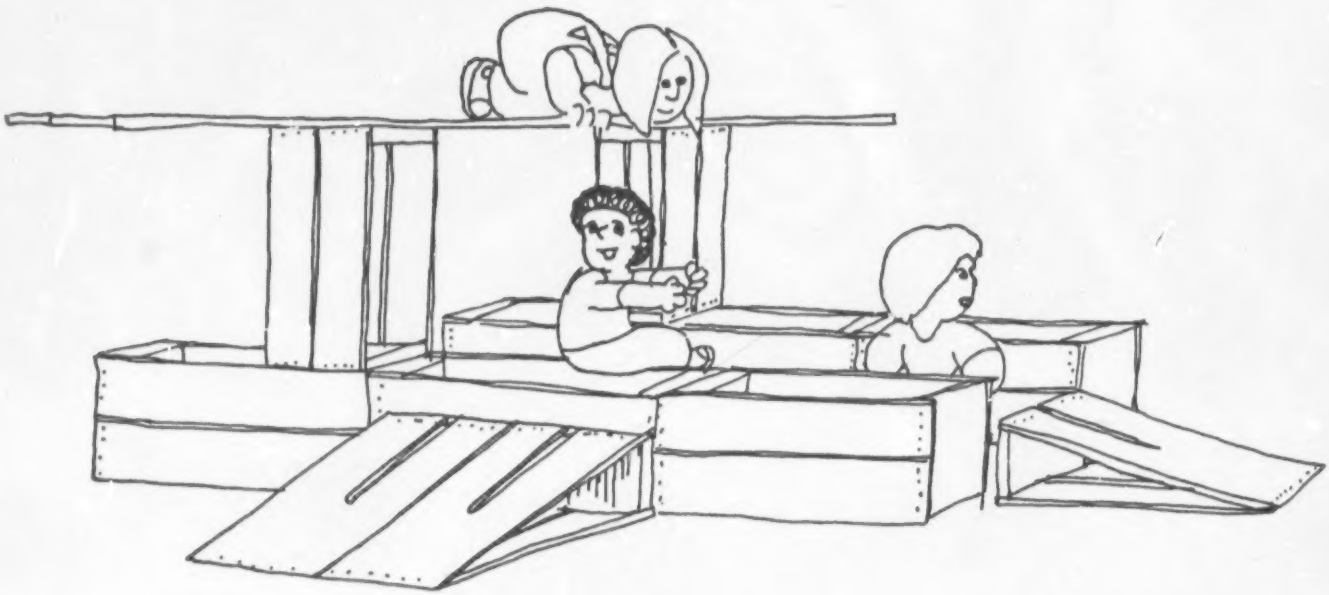


VI-3. Hollow blocks: what they are; where to get them; how hollow block play differs from unit block play; space for hollow blocks; and safety with hollow blocks.

Hollow blocks are much larger than unit blocks. The basic square is 5 1/2" x 11" x 11" and weighs 8 lbs. There are five other pieces: a half square, a double square, two lengths of flat board and a ramp.

Hollow blocks are open on the sides so that children can carry them easily. They are still quite heavy for the very young

children, but children seem to enjoy just picking them up and moving them. This is good for their large muscle development and moving something big makes them feel powerful.



Hollow blocks provide quite a different type of block activity from the unit blocks. Because of their size, hollow blocks lend themselves to dramatic play. The children construct something: a boat, an airplane, a rocket and then climb inside to pretend to be the sea captain, pilot, or astronaut.

Because they are so big, hollow blocks need a lot of building space. If you don't have enough room to have a hollow block area always available, you might consider:

- taking over another area for a week or so. Remember hollow blocks will be a noisy activity. But because they are so big, hollow blocks do not need as much protection as unit blocks do.

- if your hallway is large enough, you might try using it for hollow block building.

Hollow blocks should not be mixed in with unit blocks because of the different types of building they are used for.

Some teachers worry about safety with hollow blocks because they are heavy. One possibility is to declare the hollow blocks a "hard-hat" area and provide construction helmets. The children enjoy the hats and it is an easy rule to enforce.

Limiting the number of children allowed in the area also helps prevent accidents. The planning board suggested in Chapter II is a straight-forward way to remind the children about this.

VI-4. Home-made blocks: wooden blocks; blocks from milk cartons.

- Wooden blocks.

  It is possible to make your own blocks from wood but there are two major difficulties. You must use a good-quality hard wood and finish (sand) each block carefully to avoid splinters. In order to have buildings balance, corners meet, and to provide for math discoveries with blocks, the sizes and shapes must be exact.

  This is not easy to achieve. Still, if you enjoy wood-working or have a carpenter who wants to help, home-made blocks can be an inexpensive substitute for a commercial set.

- Milk-carton blocks.

  A block that costs almost nothing can be made from cardboard milk cartons. You can use half-pints, pints, quarts, half-gallons and gallons to make different size blocks.

  You will need:

  -- cardboard milk cartons (2 for each block)

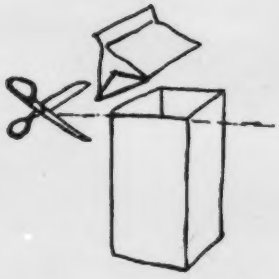
  -- newspaper

  -- rubber bands

  -- contact paper to cover (optional).

1. Cut lots of newspaper squares the size of the bottom of a carton. A paper cutter makes this task a lot easier.

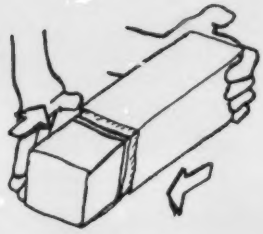
2. Cut the tops off the cartons so they have a square opening that is just like the bottom of the carton.



3. Slit <u>one</u> of the two cartons down each corner. Hold it back together with with three rubber bands.

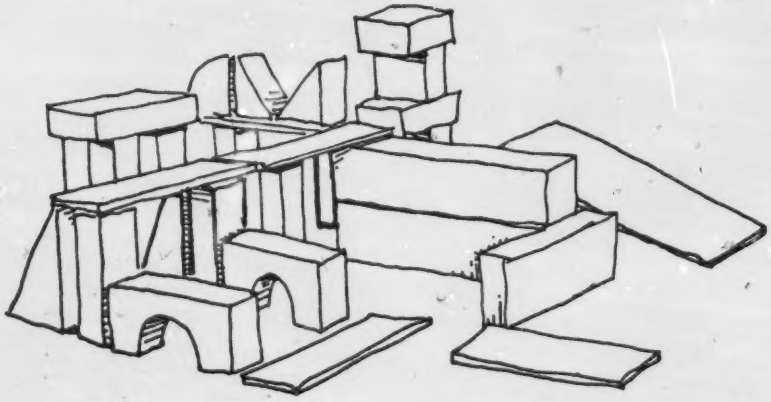
4. Pack the slit carton with newspaper squares stacked flat and pressed down. This fills the carton and gives it weight to stand up and to hold the second carton.

5. When the first carton is filled, put the second carton over the first upside down. The rubber bands will slide off. Finish your block by covering it with Con-tact paper if you like.



These cardboard blocks are very sturdy and last well.

VI-5. The care of wooden blocks.



Wooden blocks do need some attention to make them last for many years. Sandpaper will eliminate rough edges and splintery

places. A commercial wood polish like "Preen" will give the blocks a protective coat, or you can use boiled linseed oil which is also available in stores. If you do this once a year, your blocks should last a long time. Make this a parent project or do it in class one day. The children would probably enjoy helping.

Very dirty blocks can be washed but should never be allowed to soak in water. Scrub each block quickly with a stiff brush and soap or dish detergent and water. Dry thoroughly and then polish with a wood polish before using again.

VI-6. Suggested activities for teachers.

- If you have other types of blocks (hollow, table top, or bricks) observe the children while they are playing with these. Comment on what is the same and what is different about play with these blocks compared with unit block play.

- If you haven't offered hollow block play before, try making a special place for it for two weeks. What structures were made? Take photos or make sketches of what happens.

- If you have hollow blocks but don't feel they have been used imaginatively, try adding props. Some ideas would be:
  - -- a pilot's hat or a train engineer's hat
  - -- a cardboard box with knobs on it
  - -- a steering wheel mounted on a box
  - -- paper and crayon - announce that you'd be happy to write a sign if the children need it.

  Do these props make a difference in the play you see?

- A good way to obtain a set of milk carton blocks is to plan a work session for a parent meeting. Ask parents to save milk cartons and newspapers prior to the meeting and demonstrate how they are made. Parents will enjoy helping on a school project and may wish to make a set of blocks for themselves.

APPENDICES

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON BLOCKS

This Annotated Bibliography was excerpted from Resource Materials for the Creative Curriculum, by Deborah Frisby, Creative Associates.

Entries are divided into BOOKS, ARTICLES, and BOOKS FOR CHILDREN. BOOKS and ARTICLES refer to material for adults. ERIC papers, monographs, and conference reports are listed together under a separate entry.

With each entry, there is a brief annotation (a description of the content of the book or article), an evaluative comment, and an indication as to which group or groups (parents, teachers, and trainers) the item would probably interest. These are abbreviated "P" for parents, "T" for teachers, and "Tr" for teacher trainers. For each topic there is a section on books that could be read to or by the children to give them more ideas for play in that area of the classroom.

BLOCKS

Books

BLAU, ROSALIE. "Many Learnings Through Block Play." In Creating with Materials for Work and Play, Leaflet 4. Edited by Jeanne Quill. Washington, D.C.: Association for Childhood Education International, 1967-1968.

The article briefly outlines the physical, social, emotional and intellectual benefits of block play. The teacher's role in block building, and knowing types of blocks and accesories to acquire are also explored.

Useful and to the point.

P, T, Tr

BURNS, SYLVIA. "Props to Enhance Dramatic Play." In Creating with Materials for Work and Play, Leaflet 6. Edited by Jeanne Quill. Washington, D.C.: Association for Childhood Education International, 1967-1968.

The article explains how to utilize cast-off materials to add new life to flagging dramatic play and block building activities. Selectivity that should be involved in using such materials and storage facilities are also discussed.

P, T, Tr

HARTLEY, RUTH E.; FRANK, LAWRENCE K.; and GOLDENSON, ROBERT M. Understanding Children's Play. New York: Columbia University Press, 1952: 99-150

This is a very comprehensive discussion of the needs that block play fulfills in children. Some of these needs are: adventure, object of hostility, safety and calmness, being alone, fantasy play, social contact, and exploring facets of the real world. In addition, the teacher's role in block play is explored.

This is an excellent piece of writing. Good episodic examples clearly support the author's contention that blocks fulfill many of the needs of young children.

P, T, Tr

HIRSCH, ELIZABETH, ed. The Block Book. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1974.

An excellent book with separate articles by well-known educators on using blocks to develop concepts in science, mathematics, social studies, and dramatic play. This is a must for early childhood centers.

P, T, Tr

JOHNSON, HARRIET. The Art of Block Building. New York: Bank Street College of Education, 1933.

The author discusses and illustrates children's use of blocks ranging from the stage of piling and stacking to that of planned representational decorative block building.

The author uses fascinating illustrations of children's block building to show different stages of development in children's use of blocks.

An important booklet on block building stages.

P, T, Tr

JOHNSON, HARRIET. Children in the Nursery School. New York: Agathon Press, Inc., 1973: 183-211.

The author's representation is based on the contention that a child learns to deal effectively with his environment by freely using blocks and other constructive materials. She gives examples of block designs and buildings which illustrate young children's attempts to integrate and represent their experiences.

T, Tr

KROWN, SYLVIA, and MANY, MIRIAM. Threes and Fours Go To School. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974: 104-123.

The authors present an absorbing account of children's block building activities and the learning which evolves from them. They also focus on the teacher's role in stimulating children's development of block building skills and interests.

P, T, Tr

LEONARD, EDITH; VAN DEMAN, DOROTHY D.; and MILES, LEWIS E. Foundations of Learning in Childhood Education. Columbus, Ohio: Merrill Books, 1963: 335-373.

The authors discuss social, physical and emotional values derived from block play. They also elaborate on children's developmental stages of block building and the teacher's role in block play.

An important piece of writing on block play. It is written in clear language and gives good examples to illustrate points.

P, T, Tr

RUDOLPH, MARGUERITA, and COHEN, DOROTHY. "The Many Purposes of Block-building and Woodwork". In Ideas That Work with Young Children, pp. 102-111. Edited by Katherine Read Baker. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1972.

Mathematical and physical development encouraged by block play is discussed. Accessories which enhance block play are also listed.

An enthusiastic endorsement of block play.

P, T, Tr

SPRUNG, BARBARA. Guide to Non-Sexist Early Childhood Education. New Women's Action Alliance, 1975: 35-41.

The author discusses cognitive, emotional and social values of block play. She also gives good suggestions for involving girls in meaningful block play.

An excellent article for helping adults integrate girls into block play.

P, T, Tr

STARKS, ESTHER B. Blockbuilding. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association Center, 1960.

Blocks are discussed as a medium which can promote social, physical and intellectual growth. Particular emphasis is placed on the social learning involved. Examples are given and a section on the teacher's role and types of blocks is also included.

The booklet is a good introduction to the value of block play.

P, T, Tr

TAYLOR, BARBARA. A Child Goes Forth. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1964: 29-31.

The role of the teacher in providing for appropriate physical space and supervision is discussed. There is also a chart which shows areas in which block play encourages development.

A brief informative discussion of the teacher's role in block play.

P, T, Tr

BLOCKS

Articles

AMES, LOUISE BATES, and LEARNED, JANET. "Developmental Trends in Child Kaleidoblock Responses." The Journal of Genetic Psychology 84 (1954): 237-270.

This study investigates whether children respond in an age-typical way in relation to their block play. Particular areas researched are the extent of verbalization involved with play, dramatization, response to block color and shape, types of structures built and the way the child manipulates the blocks.

A good background study.

Tr

CARTWRIGHT, SALLY. "Blocks and Learning." Young Children 29 (March 1974): 141-146.

The physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development encouraged by block play is briefly discussed. The role of the teacher is also included.

Useful as a brief introduction to block play learning.

P, T, Tr

FARRELL, MURIEL. "Sex Differences in Block Play in Early Childhood Education." Journal of Educational Research 51 (December 1957): 279-284.

The findings of the study were that almost five times as many boys as girls played with blocks and that the boys planned almost twice as long as the girls. The fact that no discussion of the results is given limits the usefulness of the study.

The study results can be used to generate discussions as to whether and why block play preferences is sex related.

Tr

GRAMZA, ANTHONY F., and WITT, PETER A. "Choices of Colored Blocks in the Play of Preschool Children." Perceptual and Motor Skills 29 (December 1969): 783-787.

The findings of the study indicate that color preferences was not of primary importance in the block play of the four to five-year-old children tested. The proximity of the blocks to the children seemed to be more important factor in block usage.

The discussion of the study is mostly non-technical.

Tr

LAYMAN, A. E. "Block Play - An Essential." Elementary School Journal 40 (April 1940): 607-613.

This article points out how block play aids a child's physical and social development. It also shows how blocks are important in a child's play experiences.

P, T, Tr

MOYER, KENNETH, and VON HALLER GILMER, B. "Experimental Study of Children's Preferences and Use of Blocks in Play." The Journal of Genetic Psychology 89 (1965): 3-10.

The authors review the literature and investigate whether there are differences in block play relative to age. The results from cross-sectional studies show that stages are not necessarily related to age.

The study is written in a non-technical manner.

P, T, Tr

SALISBURY, ETHER and IVEY, HENRILU. "Blockbuilding in the Reading Readiness Program." Childhood Education 16 (1940): 221-225.
This is an exposition of the teacher's role in structuring fruitful experiences related to block play.
T, Tr

STEWART, ALAN. "The Magic World of Blocks." Instructor 83 (November 1973): 94-95.
The article informally discusses adult use of blocks with children and also some block buildings that children can make.

P, T, Tr

BLOCKS

Children's Books to Enhance Block Play

*AFRICAN PRIMARY SCIENCE PROGRAM. Activities for Lower Primary, Wheels. Newton, Mass.: Education Development Center, 1973.

ARKIN, ALAN. Tony's Hard Work Day. New York: Harper & Row, 1972.

BATE, NORMAN. Who built the Bridge? New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954.

BURTON, VIRGINIA. Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1967.

BURTON, VIRGINIA. The Little House. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1969.

GIBBONS, GAIL. Willi and His Wheel Wagon. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975.

*GERGELY, TIBOR. Busy Day, Busy People. New York: Random House, Inc., 1973.

*MATHIEU, JOE. Big Joe's Trailer Truck. New York: Random House, Inc. 1974.

MIRIAM, EVE. Bam, Zam, Boom. New York: Walker & Co., 1972.

WILSON, RODGER. Where's the Fire? Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1976.

* Black people are included in starred books.

CDA COMPETENCIES BROKEN DOWN INTO OBSERVATIONS OR EXPECTED BEHAVIORS:
(a) On a Global Scale; and (b) With Specific Reference to the Block Corner

A. Setting Up and Maintaining a Safe and Healthy Learning Environment

CDA Competency	Global Scale	Blocks
Research No. 1 CDA No. 1 Organize space into functional areas recognizable by the children, e.g. block building, library, dramatic play, etc.	A.1.1. There are different areas separated from each other and the rest of the room by furniture or room dividers that represent a House Corner, a Block area, an Art area, a Book area, and a Table Toy area with table(s) and toys.	A.1.1.1. There is an identifiable place for block activities. A.1.1.2. The Block Corner is not in the line of traffic. People who are not involved in the block area do not need to walk through it to get to any other supply or activity (including a door or a closet). A.1.1.3. If there are also hollow blocks, they have a separate, defined area which is not the same as the unit block area.
Research No. 2 CDA No. 2 Maintain a planned arrangement for furniture, equipment, and materials, and for large and small motor skills learning, and for play materials that is understandable to the children.	A.2.1. There is appropriate furniture to reflect the separation into activity areas. (Observables: tables not too high, table near art corner, comfortable place to read near books, tricycles are kept outdoors or in large muscle area.)	A.2.1.1. The shelves containing the blocks and block accessories are located in the block building area. A.2.1.2. There is an appropriate covering - flat surface on which buildings will be stable. If the floor covering is not conducive to block building provision has been made, i.e., plywood or tri-wall.

CDA COMPETENCIES BROKEN DOWN INTO OBSERVATIONS OR EXPECTED BEHAVIORS:
(a) On a Global Scale; and (b) With Specific Reference to the Block Corner

A. Setting Up and Maintaining a Safe and Healthy Learning Environment

CDA Competency	Global Scale	Blocks
		A.2.1.3. Large riding equipment should NOT be in the Block Area.
	A.2.2. Equipment and materials that belong together are near each other. (Observables: pegs are near pegboards, block accessories such as cars and animals are near blocks, etc.)	A.2.2.1. Block accessories (e.g., animals, people, trucks) are together and in the Block Area but separate from the blocks themselves.
	A.2.3. The equipment is accessible to the children. The child doesn't need the teacher's help to get at equipment. (Observables: materials are not up too high, materials are on open shelves, materials are not crowded on shelves, etc.)	A.2.3.1. Blocks and accessories are accessible to the children. A.2.3.2. The blocks are on shelves, not in boxes. A.2.3.3. The blocks are organized on the shelves by size and shape. A.2.3.4. The space on the shelf for each type of block is labeled in some way that is clear to the children (e.g., contact paper shapes). A.2.3.5. The accessories also have a definite labeled place (e.g. outline, photo, drawing).

CDA COMPETENCIES BROKEN DOWN INTO OBSERVATIONS OR EXPECTED BEHAVIORS:
(a) On a Global Scale; and (b) With Specific Reference to the Block Corner

A. Setting Up and Maintaining a Safe and Healthy Learning Environment

CDA Competency	Global Scale	Blocks
	A.2.4. The furniture and equipment are in good repair.	A.2.4.1. The Block Area and the equipment are clean. A.2.4.2. The blocks are in good condition (smooth, not splintered or chipped). A.2.4.3. The accessories are in good condition (cars have all their wheels, animals are not ripped or broken). A.2.4.4. There is nothing that seems dangerous (metal trucks with sharp edges, hard plastic trucks that are broken).
Research No. 3 CDA No. 4 Arrange the setting to allow for active movement as well as quiet engagement.	A.3.1. There is enough space in the more active areas (e.g., blocks, woodworking) so that activity does not spill over into other areas.	A.3.1.1. There is adequate floor space for 5 children to build. A.3.1.2. If possible, one of the Block Areas (especially where hollow blocks are used) is located near the House Corner to facilitate dramatic play.

CDA COMPETENCIES BROKEN DOWN INTO OBSERVATIONS OR EXPECTED BEHAVIORS:
(a) On a Global Scale; and (b) With Specific Reference to the Block Corner

A. Setting Up and Maintaining a Safe and Healthy Learning Environment

CDA Competency	Global Scale	Blocks
		A.3.1.3. Quiet areas for books or table toys should not be located next to the Block Area.
	A.3.2. The quiet areas are protected from the activity of the active and especially noisy areas (e.g., the workbench is not near the block corner, trucks from the block corner do not run into the table toys).	
	A.3.3. If there is a climber or other large muscle equipment up in the room, it is separated from quiet areas.	
Research No. 4 CDA No. 5 Establish a planned sequence of active and quiet periods, of balanced indoor and outdoor activities.	A.4.1. There is a daily schedule.	A.4.1.1. Block building is offered as an option every day that there is a normal work-play period.

CDA COMPETENCIES BROKEN DOWN INTO OBSERVATIONS OR EXPECTED BEHAVIORS:
(a) On a Global Scale; and (b) With Specific Reference to the Block Corner

A. Setting Up and Maintaining a Safe and Healthy Learning Environment

CDA Competency	Global Scale	Blocks
	A.4.2. The center or the teacher's schedule shows active and quiet activities occur sequentially and balanced. A.4.3. The schedule shows indoor and outdoor activities occur sequentially and their timing is balanced. A.4.4. There is evidence that the children know what the schedule is (e.g., <u>either</u> the schedule is posted in a way the children can read (pictures), <u>or</u> the children can verbalize what comes next, <u>or</u> the children participate in planning the schedule).	

CDA COMPETENCIES BROKEN DOWN INTO OBSERVATIONS OR EXPECTED BEHAVIORS:
(a) On a Global Scale; and (b) With Specific Reference to the Block Corner

A. Setting Up and Maintaining a Safe and Healthy Learning Environment

CDA Competency	Global Scale	Blocks
Research No. 5 CDA No. 8 Provide for flexibility of planned arrangements of space and schedule to adjust to special circumstances and needs of a particular group of children or make use of special educational opportunities.	A.5.1. The amount of materials put out for the children's use is appropriate to the emotional and cognitive levels of the children. a. If children are taking initiative and are self-directed, the teacher has provided a wide variety of materials. b. If the children do not have self-control and evidence behavior problems, the teacher has limited the number of choices and has provided duplicates and has simplified the room and its wall decorations so as to avoid distractions.	A.5.1.1. The amount and type of materials put out for block activities are appropriate to the emotional level of the child. a. For children who are beginning builders, the variety of sizes and shapes of blocks is limited (e.g., units, double units, quadruples, squares, and a few triangles, ramps, and large cylinders are available). There are also appropriate accessories for beginners (e.g., one family, a few community helpers, some familiar animals, a few cars and boats). b. For children who have had more experience, there should be greater variety (sizes and shapes) of blocks and of accessories.

CDA COMPETENCIES BROKEN DOWN INTO OBSERVATIONS OR EXPECTED BEHAVIORS:
(a) On a Global Scale; and (b) With Specific Reference to the Block Corner

A. Setting Up and Maintaining a Safe and Healthy Learning Environment

CDA Competency	Global Scale	Blocks
	A.5.2. The amount and type of equipment in the room changes over the year as the children mature emotionally and cognitively.	A.5.2.1. The teacher introduces new block shapes and accessories as the year goes on. A.5.2.2. New accessories introduce new themes - garage, bridges, community buildings. A.5.2.3. For advanced builders, the teacher provides materials for child-made accessories.
	A.5.3. The equipment is relevant to the age group of the children. (Observables: puzzles with few pieces or individual pieces with knobs for 2's but puzzles with more pieces for 4-5's; large stringing beads for 2-3's, small stringing beads for 4-5's.)	A.5.3.1. The age of the children is not as important a factor as their previous experience in deciding the quality and types of materials to put out.
	A.5.4. The room reflects the community and culture of the children.	A.5.4.1. The types of accessories available should reflect the children's ethnic and cultural background (e.g., Black family and community helpers).

CDA COMPETENCIES BROKEN DOWN INTO OBSERVATIONS OR EXPECTED BEHAVIORS:
(a) On a Global Scale; and (b) With Specific Reference to the Block Corner

A. Setting Up and Maintaining a Safe and Healthy Learning Environment

CDA Competency	Global Scale	Blocks
	A.5.5. The teacher shows flexibility in scheduling and allows the children to go on with an activity when they are intensely involved.	A.5.5.1. The teacher allows involved play to continue in the Block Area even if it means adjusting the schedule. A.5.5.2. The teacher shows sensitivity to highly involved and complex block building. A.5.5.3. The teacher gives at least one 5-minute warning that it will be time to clean up. A.5.5.4. If the children are involved in a building experience which they want to pursue, the teacher allows the building to remain up, if possible.
	A.5.6. The room is rearranged for special occasions.	A.5.6.1. Accessories are sometimes added in conjunction with a field trip or other shared experience. A.5.6.2. Themes from the House Corner might extend to the Block Area and vice versa.

CDA COMPETENCIES BROKEN DOWN INTO OBSERVATIONS OR EXPECTED BEHAVIORS:
(a) On a Global Scale; and (b) With Specific Reference to the Block Corner

A. Setting Up and Maintaining a Safe and Healthy Learning Environment

CDA Competency	Global Scale	Blocks
		A.5.6.3. Art activities may sometimes be incorporated into block building activities.
	A.5.7. The teacher is responsive to children's suggestions for changing schedule or room arrangement.	A.5.7.1. The teacher is responsive to the children's suggestions for changing schedule or arrangement in the Block Area and is supportive in making rearrangements and in supplying appropriate materials.

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CDA COMPETENCIES BROKEN DOWN INTO OBSERVATIONS OR EXPECTED BEHAVIORS:
(a) On a Global Scale; and (b) With Specific Reference to the Block Corner

B. Advancing Physical and Intellectual Competence

CDA Competency	Global Scale	Blocks
Research No. 1 CDA No. 1 Use the kind of materials, activities, and experiences that encourage exploring, experimenting, questioning that help children fulfill curiosity, gain mastery, and progress toward higher levels of achievement.	B.1.1. The materials in each activity area are familiar to the children.	B.1.1.1. At a beginning level, block accessories represent realistic items that are familiar to the children (culturally relevant). B.1.1.2. Less familiar and less realistic items are introduced by the teacher after the children have had experience with the realistic and familiar items.
	B.1.2. Each area provides enough realistic and attractive detail to enable the children to enjoy rich experiences.	
	B.1.3. The teacher is able to carry over experiences from trips or other special occasions into learning situations.	B.1.3.1. The teacher can relate block activities to experience from trips or other special occasions. B.1.3.2. The teacher can relate block activities to other areas and activities elsewhere in the room (particularly dramatic play).

CDA COMPETENCIES BROKEN DOWN INTO OBSERVATIONS OR EXPECTED BEHAVIORS:
(a) On a Global Scale; and (b) With Specific Reference to the Block Corner

B. Advancing Physical and Intellectual Competence

CDA Competency	Global Scale	Blocks
		a. The teacher can integrate something being done in another area into a block activity (e.g., make a picture of a block construction so that even after the construction is put away, the picture will remain). b. The teacher can help use the block activity to make decorations or props for themes in other areas of the room.
	B.1.4. The teacher can carry over an activity from one day to the next and expand a learning experience from one level to a higher one.	B.1.4.1. The teacher values the expansion of a building experience and makes provisions for leaving up buildings if at all possible. B.1.4.2. If buildings can't be left up, the teacher has other suggestions (drawing a sketch, taking a polaroid picture, helping them recreate the building the next day to facilitate continuation and/or expansion of the theme).

CDA COMPETENCIES BROKEN DOWN INTO OBSERVATIONS OR EXPECTED BEHAVIORS:
(a) On a Global Scale; and (b) With Specific Reference to the Block Corner

B. Advancing Physical and Intellectual Competence

CDA Competency	Global Scale	Blocks
Research No. 2 CDA No. 6 Promote cognitive power by stimulating children to organize their experience (as it occurs incidentally or pre-planned for them) in terms of relationship and conceptual dimensions; classes of objects; similarities and differences; comparative size, amount, degree; orientation in time and space; growth and decay; origins; family kinships; causality.	B.2.1. The teacher's behavior reflects an awareness of levels of emotional, cognitive, and language development, and she provides activities which are fitting to their skills.	B.2.1.1. The teacher is aware of developmental levels of block play. B.2.1.2. The teacher encourages and supports the learning skills within the child's developmental stage. B.2.1.3. The teacher understands that block play is related to number concepts and is good training for mathematical skills. B.2.1.4. The teacher is aware of how children can use block activities to work out their real life problems and fears.
	B.2.2. The teacher is accepting of the children.	B.2.2.1. The teacher accepts the child's level of play but helps the child move on when the child is ready. B.2.2.2. The teacher understands that children sometimes use blocks as an emotional release (without allowing the child to endanger him/herself or the other children).

CDA COMPETENCIES BROKEN DOWN INTO OBSERVATIONS OR EXPECTED BEHAVIORS:
(a) On a Global Scale; and (b) With Specific Reference to the Block Corner

B. Advancing Physical and Intellectual Competence

CDA Competency	Global Scale	Blocks
		B.2.2.3. The teacher assures that all children (both sexes) play in the Block Area.
	B.2.3. The teacher interacts with the children in a positive way.	B.2.3.1. The teacher enters the Block Area and interacts with the children. B.2.3.2. The teacher is willing to build with the blocks. The teacher will sit on the floor and start building to encourage children to build but the teacher does not create the building for the children. B.2.3.3. The teacher helps the children to solve problems (both construction problems and behavior problems) that arise in the Block Area but does not solve the problem for them. B.2.3.4. The teacher supports the development of a positive self-concept by helping children develop a sense of mastery and control over materials.

CDA COMPETENCIES BROKEN DOWN INTO OBSERVATIONS OR EXPECTED BEHAVIORS:
(a) On a Global Scale; and (b) With Specific Reference to the Block Corner

B. Advancing Physical and Intellectual Competence

CDA Competency	Global Scale	Blocks
		B.2.3.5. If children are using the materials in a destructive way, the teacher can redirect the children to constructive use of the materials and can handle the situation in a friendly, positive manner. B.2.3.6. The teacher's interaction expands and develops but does not inhibit the activity in the Block Area. B.2.3.7. The teacher knows when and how to intervene in the Block Area to prevent chaos (e.g., when a building collapses).
	B.2.4. The teacher interacts with the children in culturally appropriate ways.	B.2.4.1. The teacher entering the Block Area interacts with children in a way that is accepting of their culture and vernacular language.
	B.2.5. The teacher promotes interaction among the children.	B.2.5.1. The teacher maintains the Block Area as one where children's rights are respected (i.e., establishes clear rules about the Block

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B. Advancing Physical and Intellectual Competence

CDA Competency	Global Scale	Blocks
		Area). Examples would be: children are not allowed to exclude others; children may not knock down other people's constructions; children may not use blocks dangerously. B.2.5.2. The teacher encourages cooperative block building among children who are ready for it.
	B.2.6. The teacher is able to use the activity the child is involved in and enrich and expand it. The teacher is able to involve the child in an expansion of his self-chosen activity (e.g., the child on a tricycle goes to the cinema; a truck in the Block Corner becomes a construction vehicle).	B.2.6.1. The teacher provides new props or suggests new blocks to expand the child's on-going activity. B.2.6.2. The teacher provides pictures and books that help the children clarify concepts and work out architectural problems in the block area.
	B.2.7. The teacher facilitates the children's understanding of people's roles.	B.2.7.1. The teacher uses the Block Area to explore social studies topics (such as the community) and supports this with first-hand experiences such as field trips or visitors to the classroom.

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(a) On a Global Scale; and (b) With Specific Reference to the Block Corner

B. Advancing Physical and Intellectual Competence

CDA Competency	Global Scale	Blocks
	B.2.8. The teacher facilitates growth of the children's language abilities.	B.2.8.1. The teacher introduces new vocabulary during block activities (naming shapes, accessories). B.2.8.2. The teacher uses natural speech, and accepts children's incomplete sentences while modeling grammatically correct language. B.2.8.3. The teacher has some understanding of how children acquire language so she can use language expansion methods during block activities. B.2.8.4. The teacher encourages the child to talk about the block activity. B.2.8.5. The teacher describes the child's constructions and asks questions about it.
	B.2.9. The teacher facilitates growth of the children's cognitive abilities.	B.2.9.1. The teacher uses clean-up time as a learning experience - matching, same/different, classification, number concepts, shapes, spatial relationships, cooperation, responsibility.

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(a) On a Global Scale; and (b) With Specific Reference to the Block Corner

B. Advancing Physical and Intellectual Competence

CDA Competency	Global Scale	Blocks
		B.2.9.2. The teacher uses blocks to teach perceptual concepts such as balance/symmetry, visual discrimination, spatial concepts. B.2.9.3. The teacher uses blocks to teach cognitive skills such as mathematical learnings, problem-solving, social studies.
Research No. 3 CDA No. 8 Balance unstructured materials such as paint, clay, blocks, with structured materials that require specific procedures and skills; balance the use of techniques that invite exploration and independent discovery with techniques that demonstrate and instruct.	B.3.1. The teacher is able to redirect children from one area to another so they don't spend all of the work-play time doing the same thing.	B.3.1.1. The teacher encourages children who are reluctant to do block activities but does not force them. B.3.1.2. The teacher can encourage a child who is always in the Block Area to also do other activities. B.3.1.3. The teacher will involve a child in a Block Area clean-up as a first step to get a child who will not attempt block activities to use the Block Area.

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(a) On a Global Scale; and (b) With Specific Reference to the Block Corner

B. Advancing Physical and Intellectual Competence

CDA Competency	Global Scale	Blocks
	B.3.2. The teacher can balance the number of children engaged in an activity with the amount of space and material available for that activity.	B.3.2.1. If the teacher feels the need to reduce the number of children in the Block Area, she can do it without destroying the enthusiasm for the project and without hurting the child's feelings.
	B.3.3. The teacher can balance the amount of time she/he actively participates in an activity and the amount of time that the children are self-directed.	B.3.3.1. The teacher intervenes in block activities to promote social, cognitive, and language growth but does not intervene when the child's needs would best be met by allowing him/her to work alone. B.3.3.2. The teacher can judge appropriately how important it is to remain in the Block Area in order to sustain constructive block play.

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